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THE CASTLE OF SMAR JBEIL

A Frankish Feudal Stronghold in Lebanon

Anis Chaaya

ABSTRACT

Smar Jbeil is a medieval stronghold built during the Crusader period. A feudal mountain castle belonging to the barony of Boutron (Batrun), it was part of the Crusader county of Tripoli. The castle witnessed three consecutive phases of construction. The first phase is dated to the first quarter of the twelfth century AD. The barbican was built in third phase of construction, and its architectural elements date to the beginning of the second half of the twelfth century AD. This typical mountain fortress acted as a military observation post, controlling the settlements and sites of the inner countryside.

KEYWORDS: medieval, castles, stronghold, poliorcetics, Lebanon, county of Tripoli, Crusades, Batrun

During the early Middle Ages, the Levant fell progressively under the hegemony of Arab-Islamic culture (Dussaud 1941; Ducellier, Kaplan, and Martin 1978). This political reality made travel by Christian pilgrims to the holy city of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulcher difficult—if not dangerous. In March 1095, the Byzantine emperor, Alexios I Komnenos, sent an ambassador to Pope Urban II, requesting aid against the Seljuk Turks, who had conquered nearly all of Asia Minor. This, coupled with the sociopolitical situation in the Latin West and the repetitive demands from the Byzantine Empire for military assistance from Western Europe (Balard 2001: 22, 32), led Urban II to call for an armed pilgrimage (later termed the First Crusade) into the Holy Land. The ostensible reason for his announcement, detailed in contemporaneous records from the Council of Clermont in November 1095, was, on the one hand, to deliver Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulcher from Muslims, and, on the other, to help the failing Byzantine Empire (Balard 2001: 43–57; Nicolle 2001: 23; Flori 2002a–b). Many historians have, of course, explored the more complex factors underlying the First Crusade, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

The crusaders conquered Jerusalem and created four Latin states in the Levant (Felori 1999; Edbury 1999), one of which was the county of Tripoli, encompassing modern Lebanon and Syria. The Franks secured their new territories by creating a series of strongholds. In the county of Tripoli, their network of fortifications was made up of: cities with citadels, such as Jbeil/Gibelet (Deschamps 1973: 9, 205–15; Grousset [1934] 1991: 340–41; Balard 2001: 191; Chaaya 2010a: 112–45; 2014); towns with castles, such as the *bourg* of Tripoli[1] and the castle of Saint Gilles (Salamé-Sarkis 1980: 18–23; Chaaya 2007–2008: 141–43; 2010a: 187–224; 2010b: 118–22); castles established in

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mountainous areas, such as the castle of Smar Jbeil, or on the coastal plain, such as the castle of Qleiʿat in the northern ʿAkkar plain (Condé 1960: 556–58; Deschamps 1973: 54; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999: 405–6; Chaaya 2010a: 231–37); towers, such as Bourj Bhanine (Chaaya 2005–2006); and fortified caves, such as the caves of ʿAssi Hadath el-Jobbeh (Baroudi, Khawaja, and Maroun 1989; Baroudi 1998) and ʿAssi Hawqa (Baroudi, Khawaja, and Maroun 1988: 6–17) (Fig. 1).

One of the castles of the Crusader fortress system in the county of Tripoli is the castle of Smar Jbeil. It is perched 400 m above sea level on a rocky promontory that is part of the foothills of Tannourine Mountain in the Mount Lebanon range. It is surrounded by a cliff on the north side with steep slopes to the west and south, where it overlooks the course of the Nahr al-Madfoun River (Fig. 2). The castle is located approximately 5 km to the southeast of the modern city of Batrun (Deschamps 1973: 9)[2] and is fitted with a complex defensive system. It was not mentioned in ancient sources and is, largely, archaeologically unexplored.[3] A detailed analysis of its fortifications and ruins allows for a better understanding of the history of the site and its evolution, consequently offering a relative dating of its different architectural components. It also sheds light on the role the castle might have played during the medieval period.

Smar Jbeil—History and Setting

Smar Jbeil is also referred to in the sources as Esmor Jbeil. According to an etymological study, the appellation of Smar Jbeil means "guardian (or protector) of Jbeil" (Freyha 1996: 91). According to tradition, Smar Jbeil was a mountain refuge that held an important place in Maronite history. It is believed that the first Maronite patriarch, Saint John Maron, lived there for some time during the late seventh century AD (Moosa 1986).[4] The castle appears to have been the seat of the bishopric of the Maronite Church in the nineteenth century according to church archives. In fact, the main tower of the castle was the property of the Maronite Church—specifically its bishopric—until its expropriation in 1997 by the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) of Lebanon.[5]

French archaeologist René Dussaud mentioned the castle briefly (1927: 70–71), as did his compatriot Ernest Renan, who focused more on the oldest ruins of Smar Jbeil, such as the Roman tombs beneath the castle and the inscriptions from the Byzantine period (1864: 244). Paul Deschamps published a small paragraph on the castle along with a plan drawn by French architect Jean Lauffray (Deschamps 1973: 302–3). According to Deschamps, it is a Romanesque castle, similar in style to the castles of Gibelet/Byblos and Castrum Rubrum (Elisséeff 1967: 239; Deschamps 1973: 210) (see Fig. 1).[6] Their plan of the castle, however, does not correspond to the actual state of the site. Indeed, there are several gaps in the plot of the castle and in the statement of its details.[7]

The modern village of Smar Jbeil stretches to the east and northeast of the castle. During the Crusader period, it was a medieval *bourg*. Today, it has two churches, parts of which date to the twelfth–thirteenth centuries AD. One of the churches is dedicated to Mar ("Saint") Nohra and the other to Es-Saydeh (the Virgin Mary) (Nordiguian and Voisin 1999: 353). The church dedicated to Mar Nohra preserves Romanesque architectural elements in its western and southern walls (Condé 1960: 188; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999: 353) (Figs. 3–4). About 12 m to the southeast, the church dedicated to Es-Saydeh has a typical local Romanesque architectural plan and style (Nordiguian and Voisin 1999: 411–12). It is in a bad state of preservation (Fig. 5); however, traces of the mural paintings can still be seen in its apse, as well as on all of its walls. In particular, a decorative motif consisting of crosses inscribed in a circle is identifiable and could date to the twelfth century AD (Fig. 6). These crosses are similar to those found in the chapel of the hermitage of Mar Bishoy (Bichoy)[8] and in the monastery of Saint Anthony the Great Qozhaya in the Qadisha Valley.[9] Elsewhere, an ancient olive press was found on a terrace to the southwest of the castle (Fig. 7).

The castle was erected on the remains of a Roman site.[10] In addition to its natural defenses to the north, west, and south, a ditch cut into the rock protects it (Figs. 8–9). Its structure has the shape of an irregular parallelogram, measuring approximately 67 m northwest–southeast and 63.5 m northeast–southwest. It consists of two adjacent ramparts—the main one is reinforced by a barbican[11] (Durand 2001: 17), located on the northwestern and

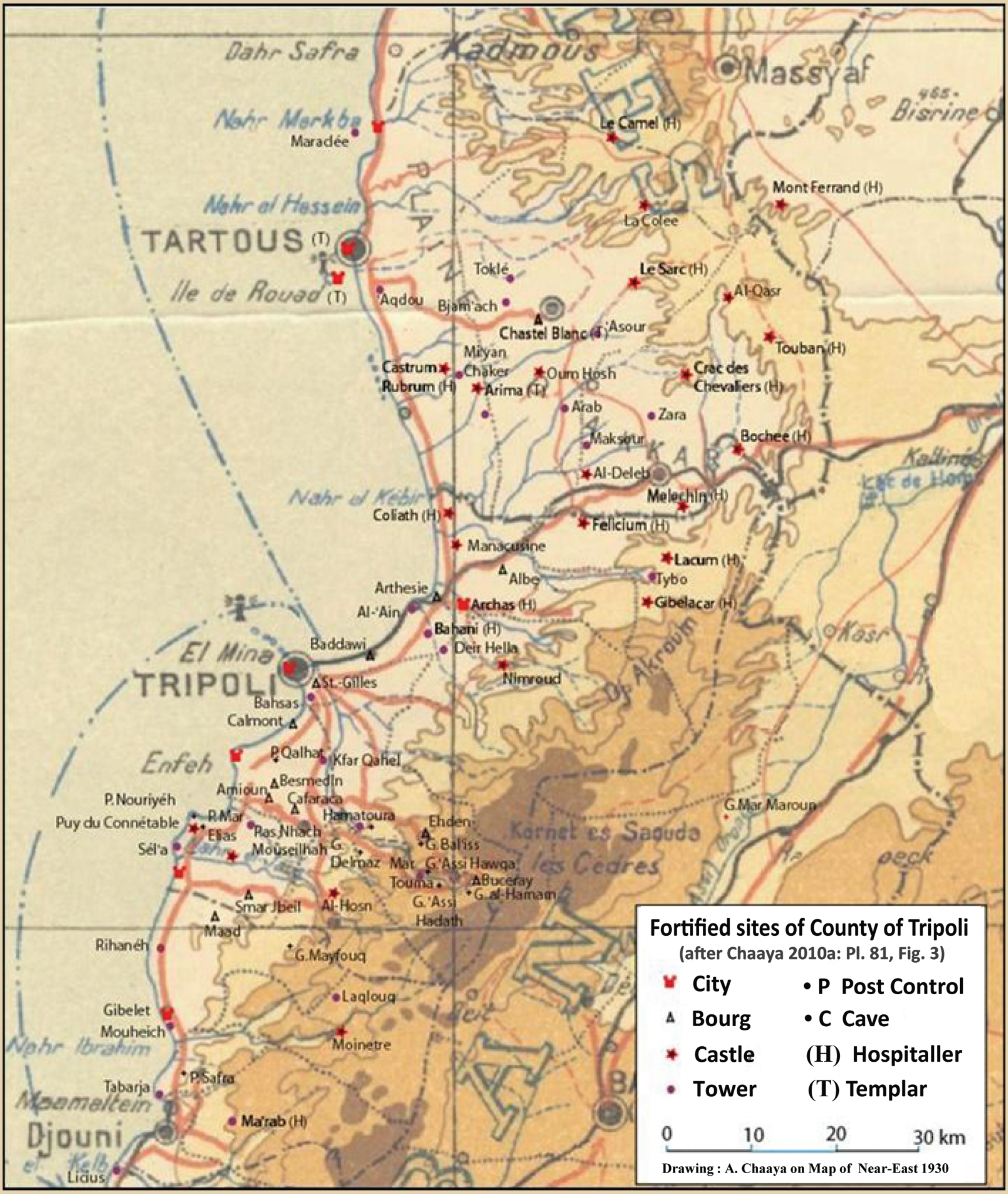

Dahr Safra
Kadmous
Massyaf
Bisrine
Nahr Merkba
Maradée
Le Camel (H)
Nahr al Hessein
Mont Ferrand (H)
La Colee
TARTOUS (T)
Ile de Rouad (T)
Toklé
Le Sarc (H)
Al-Qasr
Aqdou
Bjam'ach
Chastel Blanc (T)
'Asour
Touban (H)
Miyan
Castrum Rubrum (H)
Chaker
Arima (T)
Oum Hosh
Crac des Chevaliers (H)
Arab
Zara
Maksour
Bochee (H)
Al-Deleb
Melechin (H)
Lac de Homs
Nahr al Kébir
Coliath (H)
Felicium (H)
Manacusine
Albe
Lacum (H)
Tybo
Arthesie
Al-'Ain
Archas (H)
Gibelacar (H)
Bahani (H)
Baddawi
Deir Hella
El Mina
TRIPOLI
St.-Gilles
Nimroud
Dj. Akroum
Kasr
Bahsas
Calmont
Enfeh
P. Qalhat
Kfar Qahel
Amioun
Besmedin
Cafaraca
P. Nouriyéh
Puy du Connétable
P. Mar Elias
Ras Nhach
Hamatoura
Ehden
Sél'a
Mouseilhah
G. Delmaz
G. Bal'iss
Kornet es Saouda
les Cèdres
Mar Touma
G.'Assi Hawqa
Buceray
G. al-Hamam
G.'Assi Hadath
G. Mar Maroun
Smar Jbeil
Al-Hosn
Maad
Rihanéh
G. Mayfouq
Laqlouq
Gibelet
Mouheich
Nahr Ibrahim
Moinetre
P. Safra
Tabarja
Nahr Maameltein
Ma'rab (H)
Djouni
Nahr el Kelb
Licius
Fortified sites of County of Tripoli
(after Chaaya 2010a: Pl. 81, Fig. 3)
City
Bourg
Castle
Tower
• P Post Control
• C Cave
(H) Hospitaller
(T) Templar
0
10
20
30 km
Drawing : A. Chaaya on Map of Near-East 1930

FIG. 1
Map of the county of Tripoli (after Chaaya 2010a: pl. 81, fig. 3).

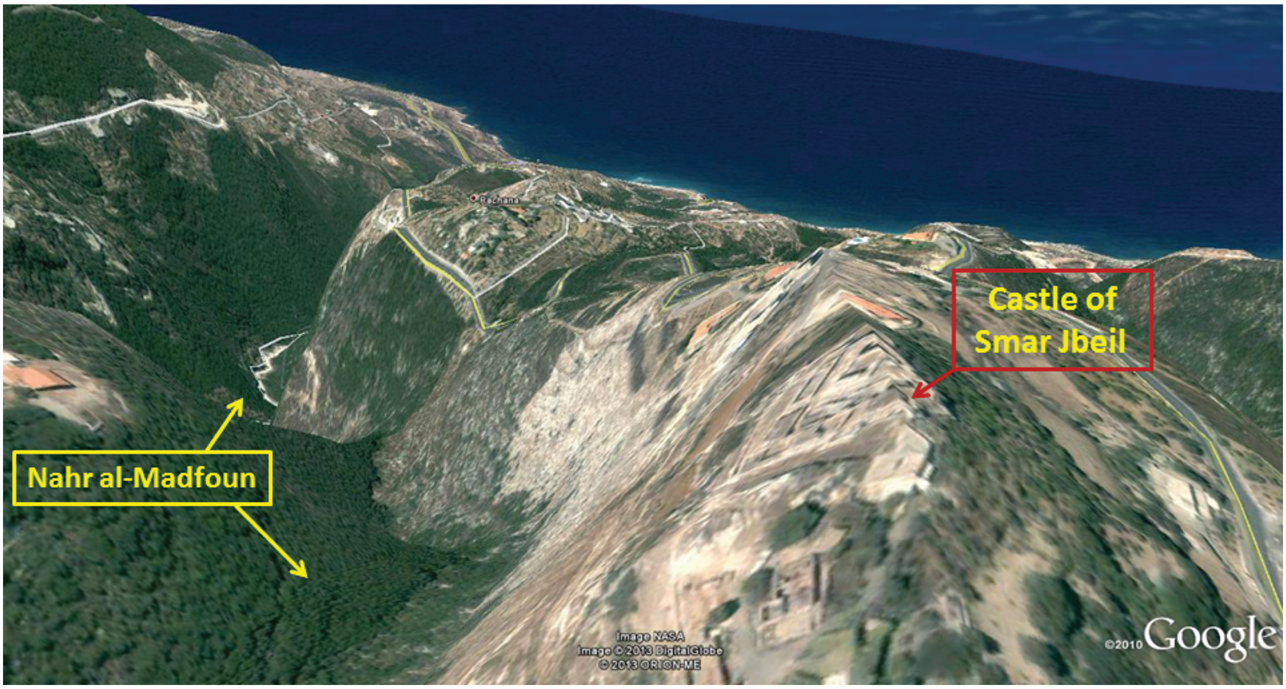


FIG. 2

A view of Smar Jbeil, controlling the course of the Nahr al-Madfoun River. (Map data © Google Earth and DigitalGlobe.)

southwestern sides that protect the entrance of the castle. The whole castle is built of white limestone blocks. Some parts, like the central tower, are built with stones bearing embossments. The barbican is built with smaller limestone blocks. Each of Smar Jbeil's elements and architectural structures and their contribution to its defensive function are described below.[12]

The Ditch, the Barbican, and the Main Entrance

The ditch (southeast of the castle) is cut into the rock to isolate the castle from the natural rocky hill, which expands toward the southeast (see Fig. 9). It measures approximately 55.5 m long and 15.50 m wide. It is clear that this ditch was planned at the same time as the construction of the first phase of the castle. Besides its defensive purpose, it served as a quarry for the construction of the castle.

The barbican is composed of two curtain walls, linked to the projecting corner tower (T8). The barbican is a second enclosure that surrounds the castle to the southwest and northwest. The two curtain walls, varying in thickness between 1.30 and 1.40 m, abut the castle's original fortification at the level of the southern corner tower (T5) and the middle of the Curtain Wall C1. The barbican is equipped with two entrances; both are located in the same southern Curtain Wall C7 of the barbican—the main entrance to the west and a postern at the eastern edge. The main access to the castle is an entrance located at the end of a trail that runs along Curtain Wall C7 (Fig. 10). It is a right-hand side entrance, where the right flank of the assailants is exposed to arrows from the slits in the curtain wall[13] (Vitr. *De arch*. 1.2; Durand 2001: 30). The barbican wall has a conserved foundation to an average height of 1.4 m in some places, although only the vestiges of five to six arrow slits, as well as a drain for waste water, are still visible.

The gate of the main entrance is 3.45 m wide and had two adjoining doors with wooden panels (the door sockets are well preserved) (Fig. 11). It was probably covered with metallic strips and studded with big iron nails. This entrance is built as an *entrée en sas* with another panel door on the northeastern side. This door is located within range of the southwestern arrow slit of corner Tower T1. Two doors, located at the northern ends of the passageway walls, provide access to two firing chambers equipped with several arrow slits (Fig. 12). Two of these arrow slits

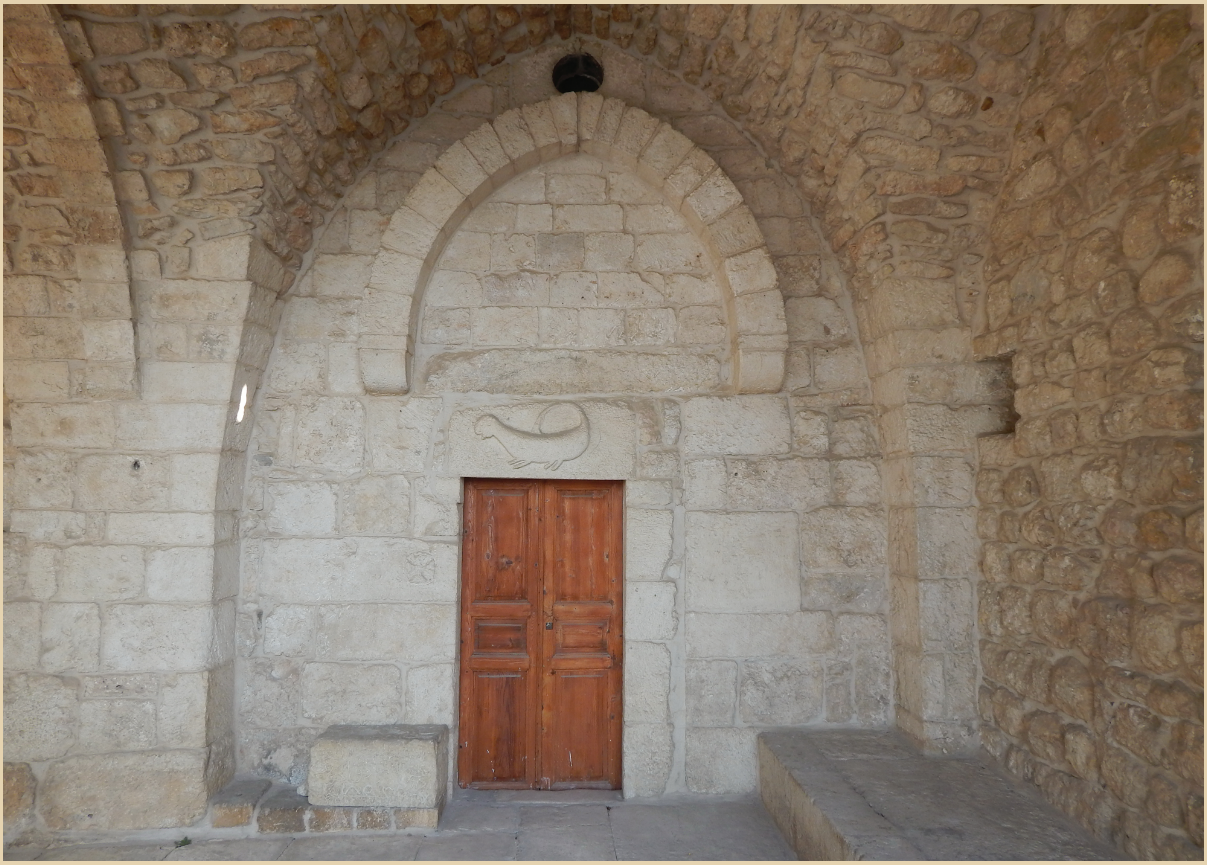


FIG. 3

A decorated Romanesque architectural element in the southern door of the western façade of the church dedicated to Mar Nohra. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

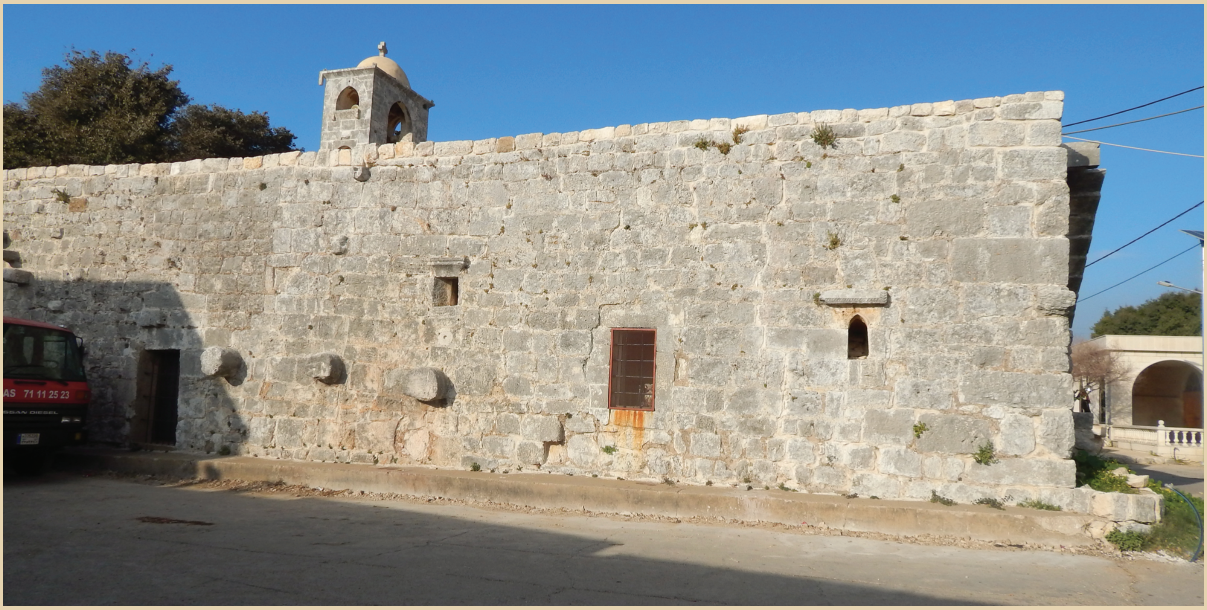
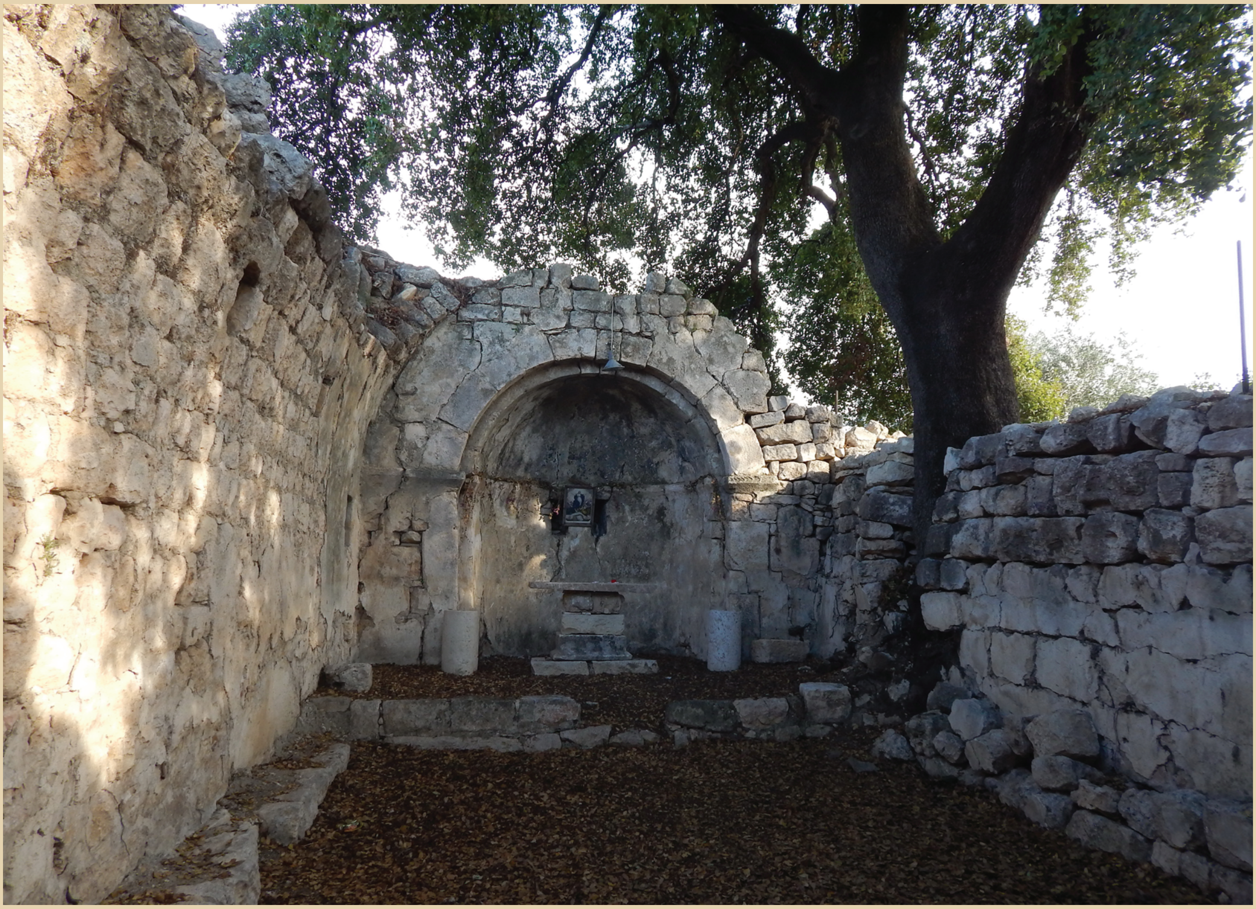


FIG. 4

Two Romanesque windows in the southern wall of the church dedicated to Mar Nohra. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)



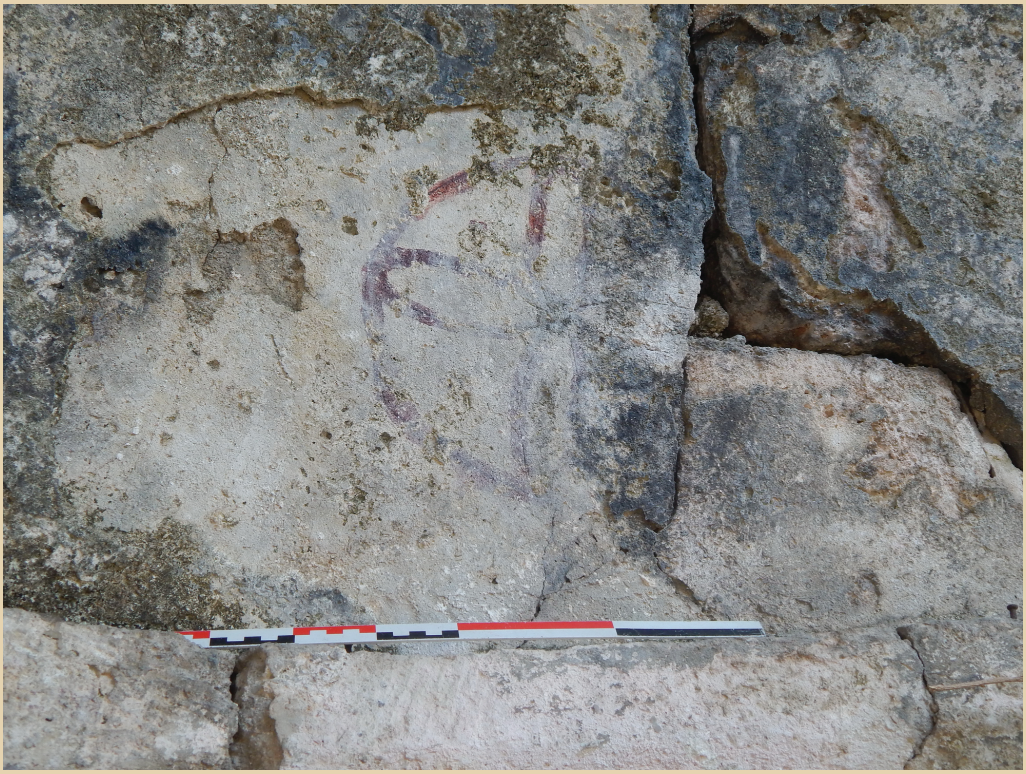


FIG. 5
The church dedicated to Es-Saydeh has a typical local Romanesque architectural plan and style. Today, the vaulted roof has collapsed. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

FIG. 6
Traces of painted crosses enclosed in a circle decorate the apse walls of the church dedicated to Es-Saydeh. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

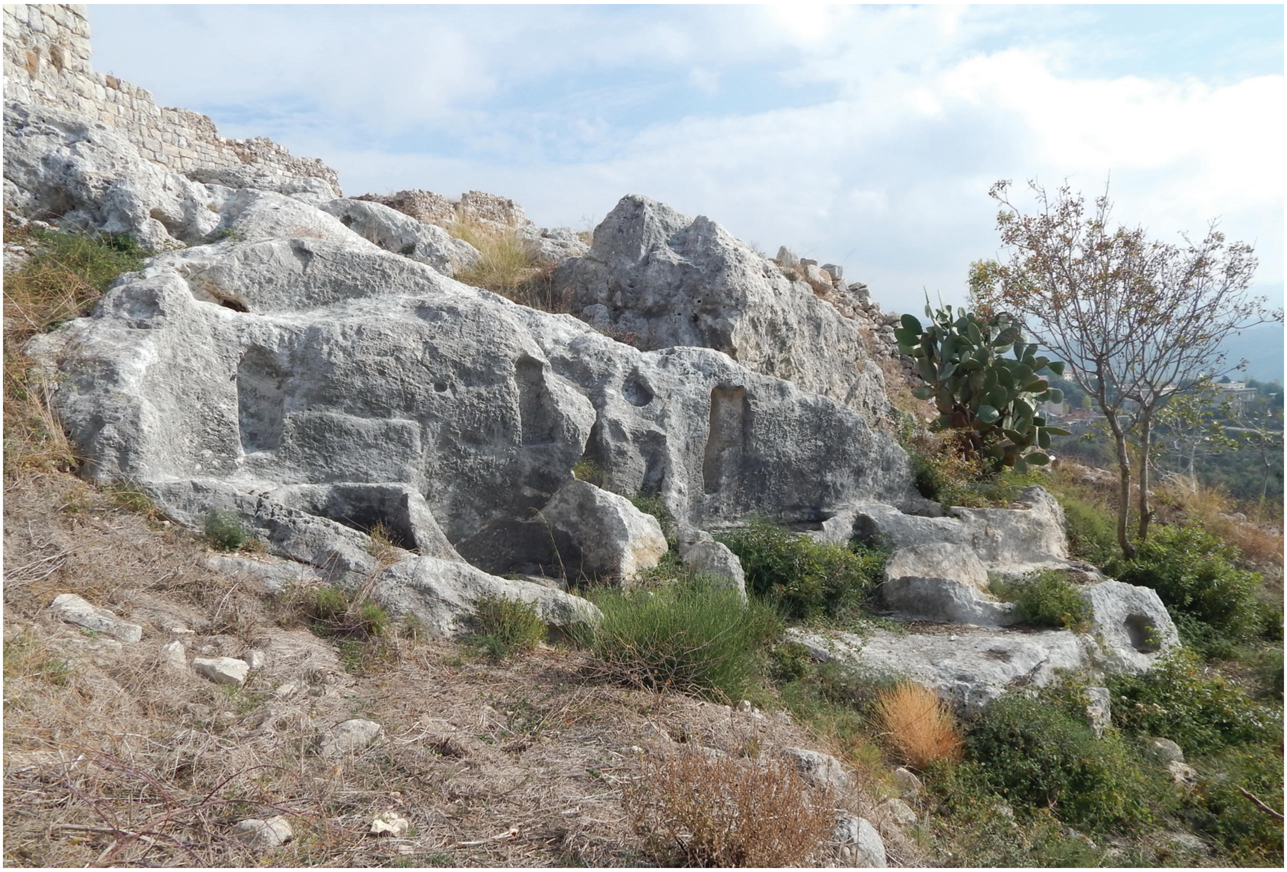


FIG. 7

An ancient olive press located southwest of the castle of Smar Jbeil. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

are located between the main entrance and corner Tower T8, while four others are on the eastern side of this entry. This passageway could be defended from arrow slits that would have been installed in its walls from the adjacent firing chambers.

The postern or side entrance (Pt3) is 0.70 m wide and is cut into the rock, which is used both for its foundation and walls (Fig. 13). This postern leads to a staircase cut into the rock. An arrow slit is located at the eastern end of the curtain wall at the top of a small wall segment, measuring 2 m and oriented north–south, providing overwatch for the path crossing the southern part of the ditch (Fig. 14). The presence of this elevated arrow slit indicates the existence of a brattice or murder hole in this portion of the barbican overlooking and defending the postern.

The western corner tower (T8) is rectangular and has two stories; however, only its ground floor is preserved to its original height. Each side of the ground floor is equipped with an arrow slit (see Fig. 8). The upper floor also had to be defended by four arrow slits, similar in type and location to those of the ground floor. The arrow slits, oriented to the east and north, ensured the protection of the respective southwest (C7) and northwest (C8) curtain walls. Thus, the defenders had a good commanding position on the outskirts of the barbican. The northwestern curtain wall (C8) follows the contour lines in this section. It is preserved to a height of up to 2 m in its northern part and up to the middle of its arrow slits in its southern part (Fig. 15). Eleven preserved arrow slits defend Curtain Wall C8. The overall aspect of the castle is a trapezoidal shape with four towers placed at its corners (T1, T2, T3, and T5). In addition, towers are located in the middle of the southeastern (T4) and southwestern (T6) sides. The main tower is built in the middle of the castle on an elevated podium cut into the bedrock (see Fig. 8).

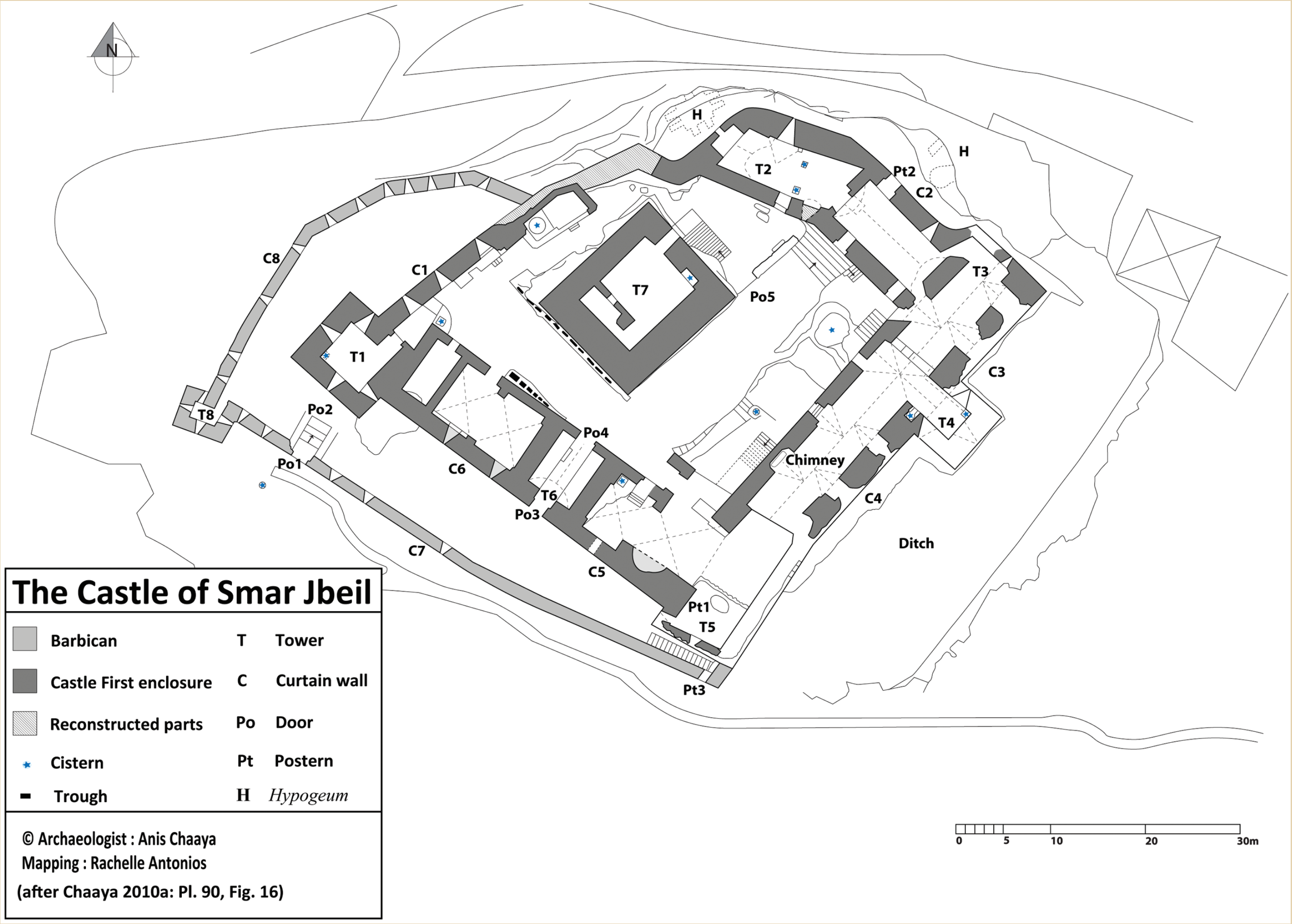

The Castle of Smar Jbeil
Barbican
Castle First enclosure
Reconstructed parts
Cistern
Trough
T Tower
C Curtain wall
Po Door
Pt Postern
H *Hypogeum*
© Archaeologist : Anis Chaaya
Mapping : Rachelle Antonios
(after Chaaya 2010a: Pl. 90, Fig. 16)
N
H
T2
Pt2
C2
H
C8
C1
T7
Po5
T3
T1
C3
T8
Po2
Po4
T4
Po1
C6
Chimney
T6
Po3
C4
C7
C5
Ditch
Pt1
T5
Pt3
0
5
10
20
30m

FIG. 8
Plan of the castle of Smar Jbeil (after Chaaya 2010a: pl. 90, fig. 16).

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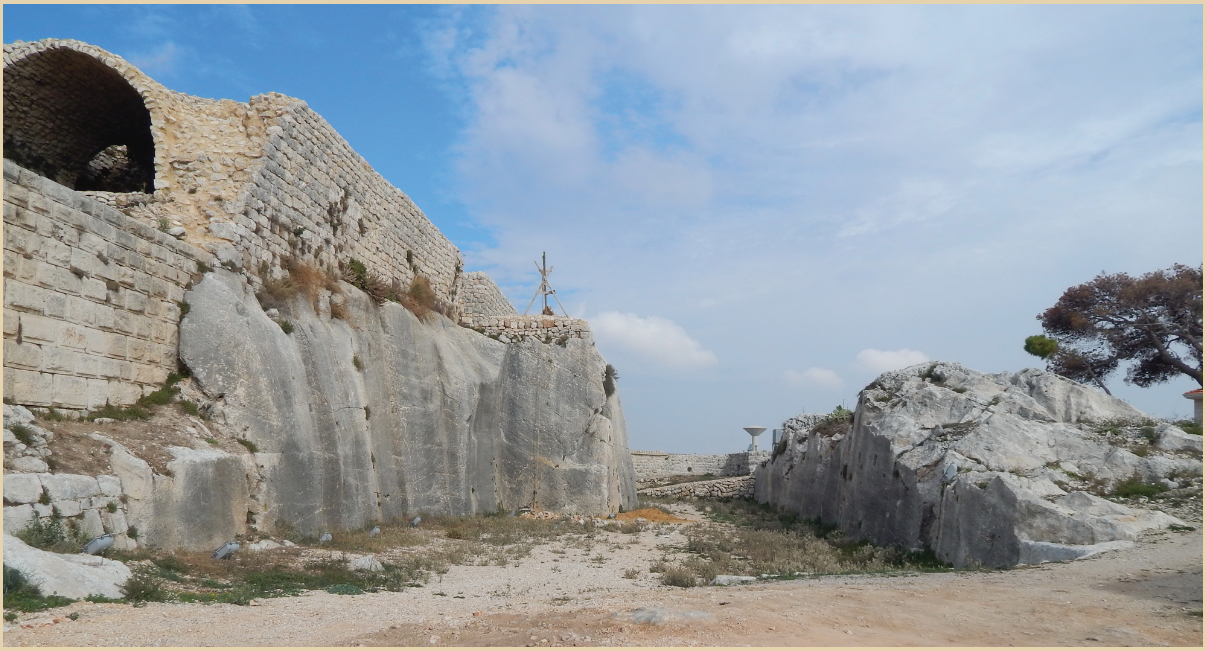

FIG. 9

A ditch cut into the rock defends the castle from the southeastern side. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

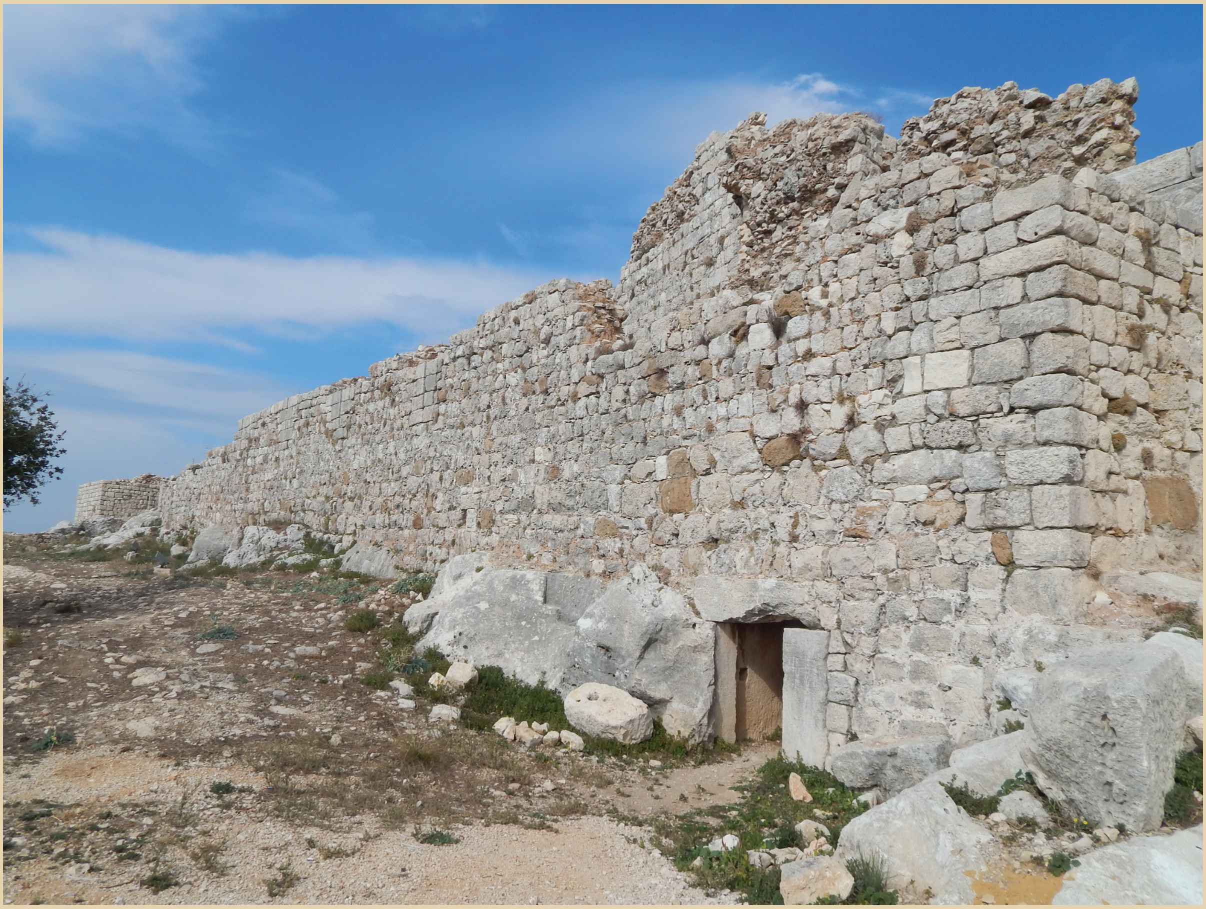

FIG. 10

The trail on the southern side leading to the barbican and the main entrance of the castle. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

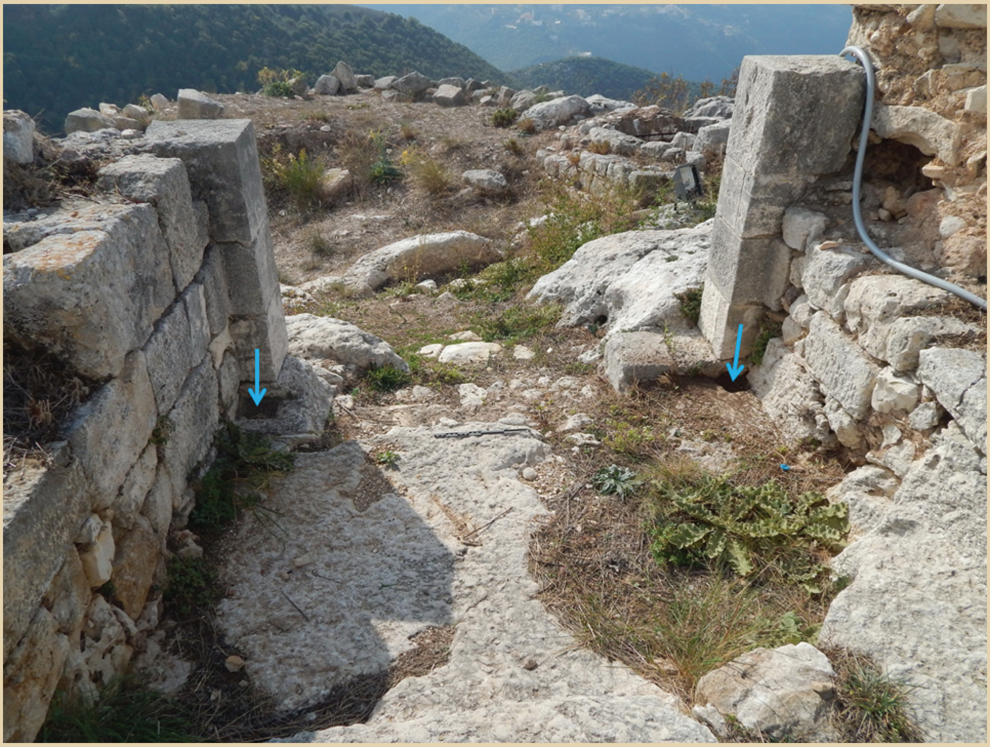

FIG. 11

The gate of the main entrance of the barbican with preserved sockets (marked with blue arrows) of two adjoining doors. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

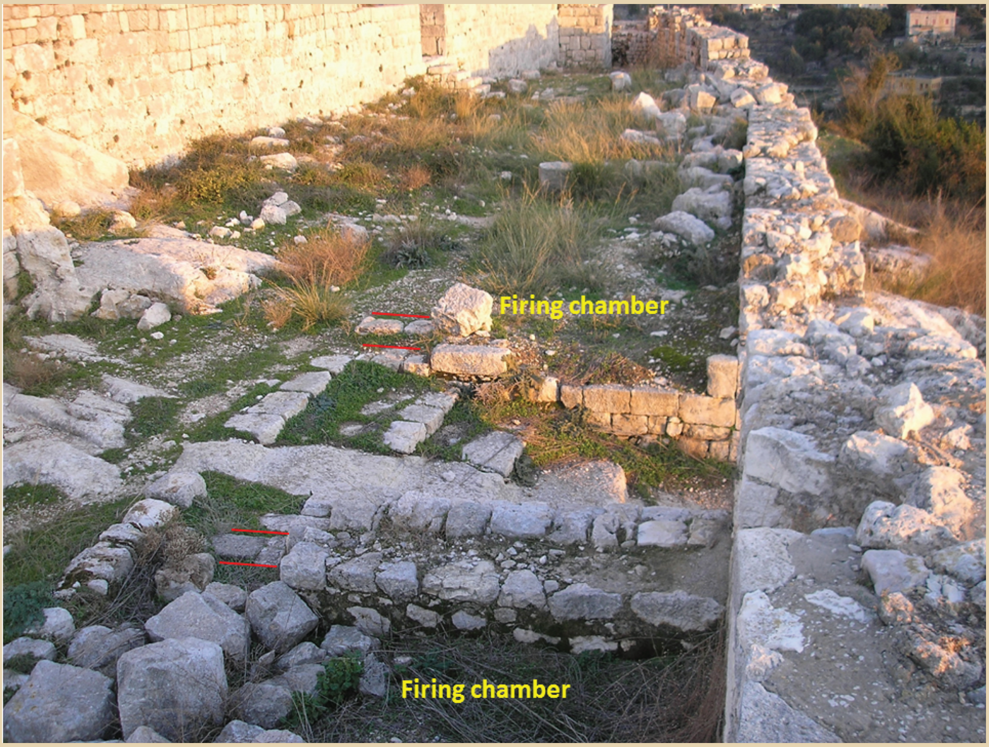
Firing chamber
Firing chamber

FIG. 12

Two doors (stairs marked in red) granted access from the gate passageway of the barbican to two firing chambers. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

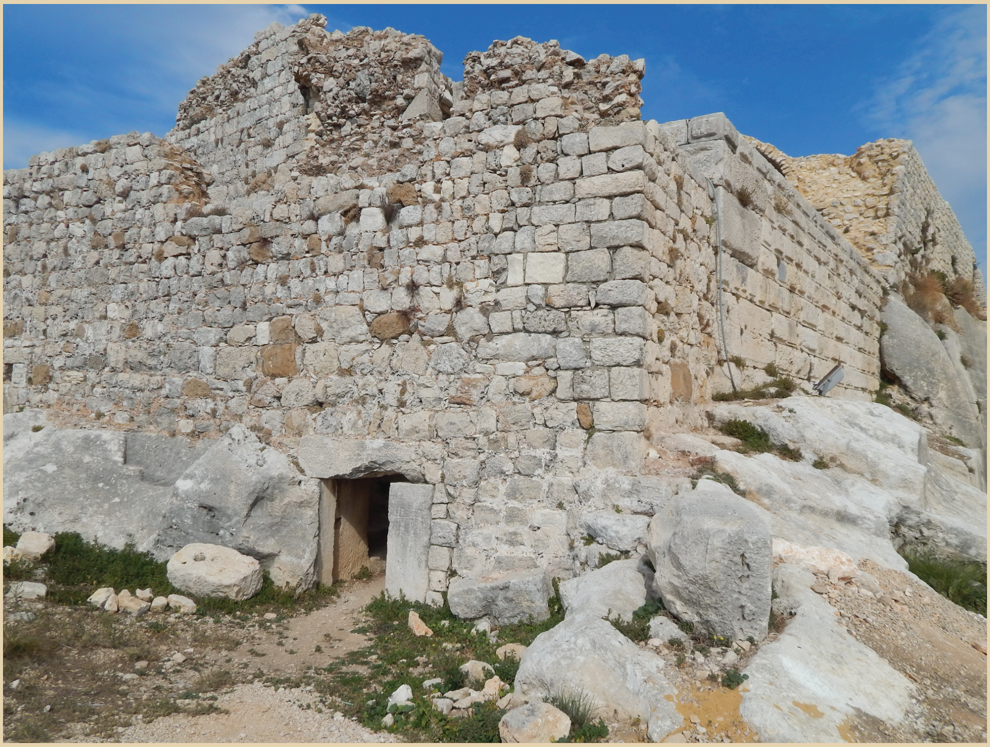

FIG. 13

Postern Pt3 was cut partly into the rock. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

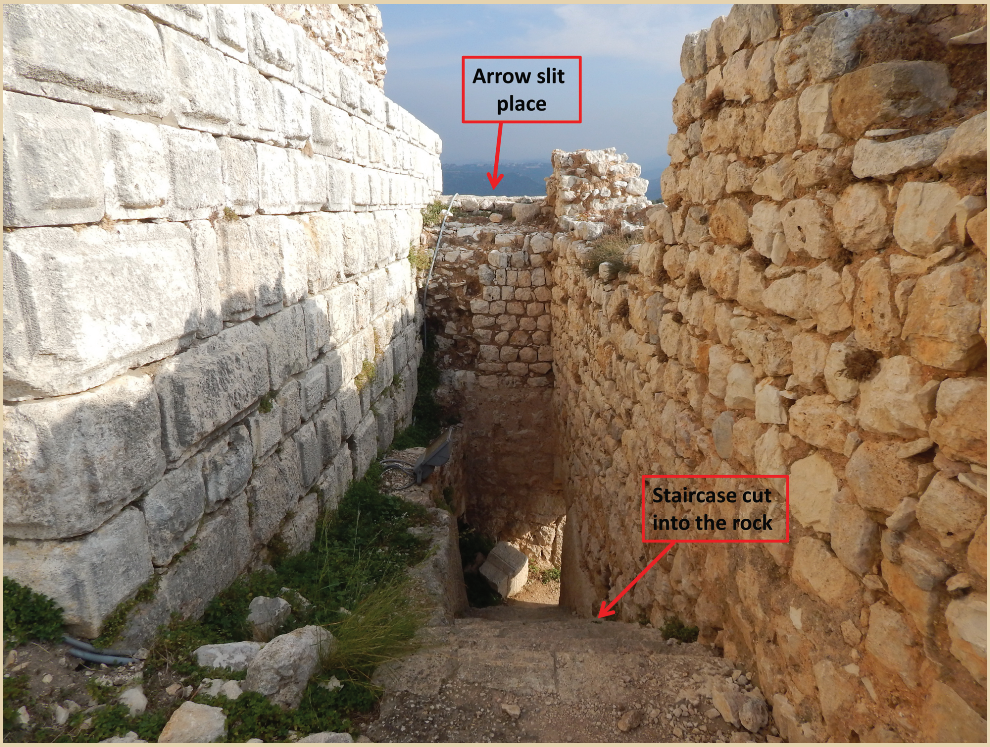
Arrow slit place
Staircase cut into the rock

FIG. 14

The staircase cut into the rock and the arrow slit located to the east of Curtain Wall C7. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

The main entrance of the castle is located on the ground floor of the gate tower (T6). This gate tower is flanked by two salient corner towers (T1 and T5) (Fig. 16). The entrance is an *entrée en sas*—a gate with double doors placed at each end (see Fig. 8). All of the door sockets are still preserved (Fig. 17).[14] The gate is located 1 m above the ground level of the outer court. This implies the existence of a wooden staircase or a removable wooden rail (Fig. 18). Defense of this door is ensured by two arrow slits, located in the two salient corner towers (T1 and T5), and a brattice[15] above the gate. A corbel that once carried the balcony of a brattice was found a few meters from the gate-tower entrance (Fig. 19). This entrance's passageway has two stone benches installed along its side walls. The passageway also covers a drain that channels rainwater from the internal court of the castle to the outer court (Fig. 20). The entrance was covered by a barrel vault that supported at least a second floor. The central part of this vault has collapsed (see Fig. 18), but it was probably fitted with a hatch in the ceiling to control the *entrée en sas* from the upper floor (Chaaya 2007–2008: 56).[16] The main entrance leads to an open space to the north and to a stable to the left, where water troughs were cut into the rock (Fig. 21). The central tower (T7) or donjon is located between this open space and the stables. The donjon is built on a bedrock platform approximately 4 m high that has the same dimensions as the tower.

This entrance is flanked by two adjacent buildings separating it from the two salient corner towers (T3 and T5) (see Fig. 8). The eastern building was composed of two

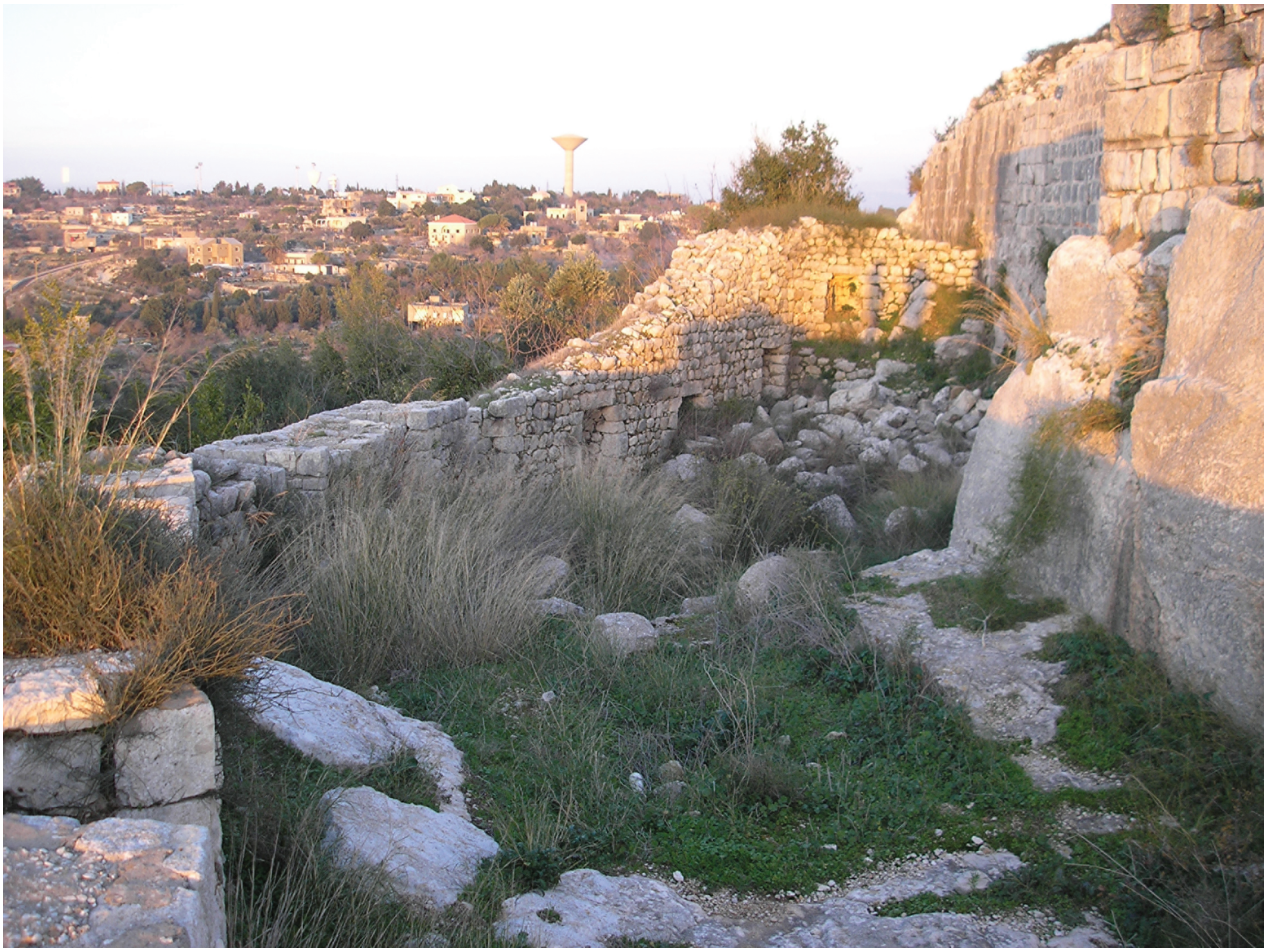

FIG. 15

The western part of the barbican and its northwestern Curtain Wall C8. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

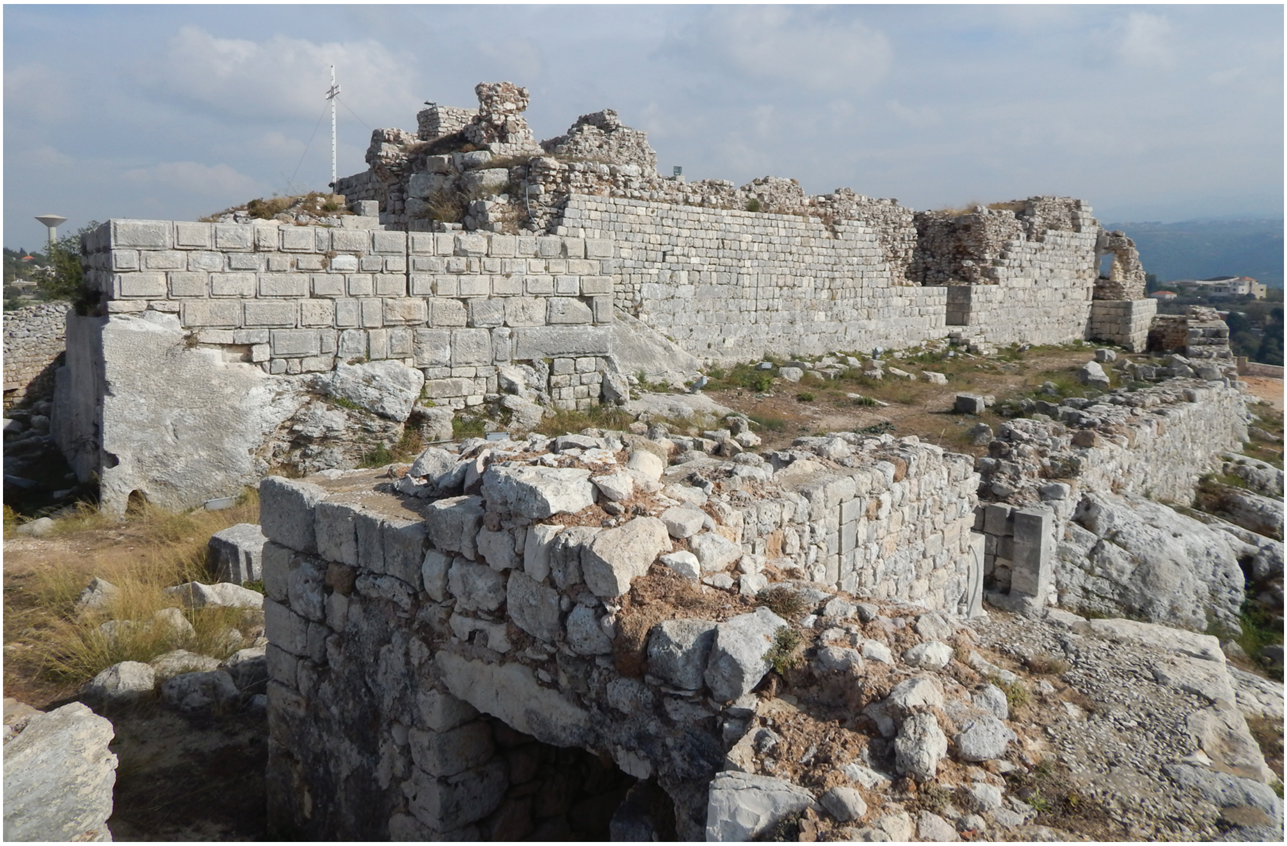

FIG. 16
Gate Tower T6 flanked by salient corner Towers T1 and T5. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

stories. Its southeastern wall constitutes Curtain Wall C4, while its southwestern wall is made of Curtain Wall C5. Only part of the ground floor is still preserved. This floor has no opening on the outside. It is composed of a rectangular room made of three spans aligned east–west. The two western spans are well preserved. They are covered by two cross vaults with a transverse arch in between them (Fig. 22). However, the eastern span has lost its ceiling, as well as its upper floor. A water tank is carved into the rock to the right of the entrance of the building in the northwestern corner (Fig. 23). The entrance door to this floor/room is located in the middle of the northern wall of the western span. It is 1.50 m wide but is not preserved to its original height. The orientation of this room and the high quality of its vault finishing, as well as its large size and its location close to the castle entrance, suggest that it served as the chapel of the castle.

Another two-floored building can be identified to the west of the gate tower. Its southwestern wall is Curtain Wall C6, and only its ground floor is preserved. However, the foundations of the interior walls of the upper floor are preserved and recognizable on top of the ground-floor walls of this building. The ground floor consists of two separate rooms without any passage between them. However, both rooms open onto the interior court through two doors placed in their northern walls. The eastern room is rectangular and oriented northwest–southeast. Its southern wall had two arrow slits that offered protection to the space outside of Curtain Wall C6. The western room is narrow and has no openings besides its entrance door.

The Salient Corner Towers

Corner Tower T1 flanks the main entrance from the west. Access to this tower is through a narrow passage located between northwestern Curtain Wall C1 and the building

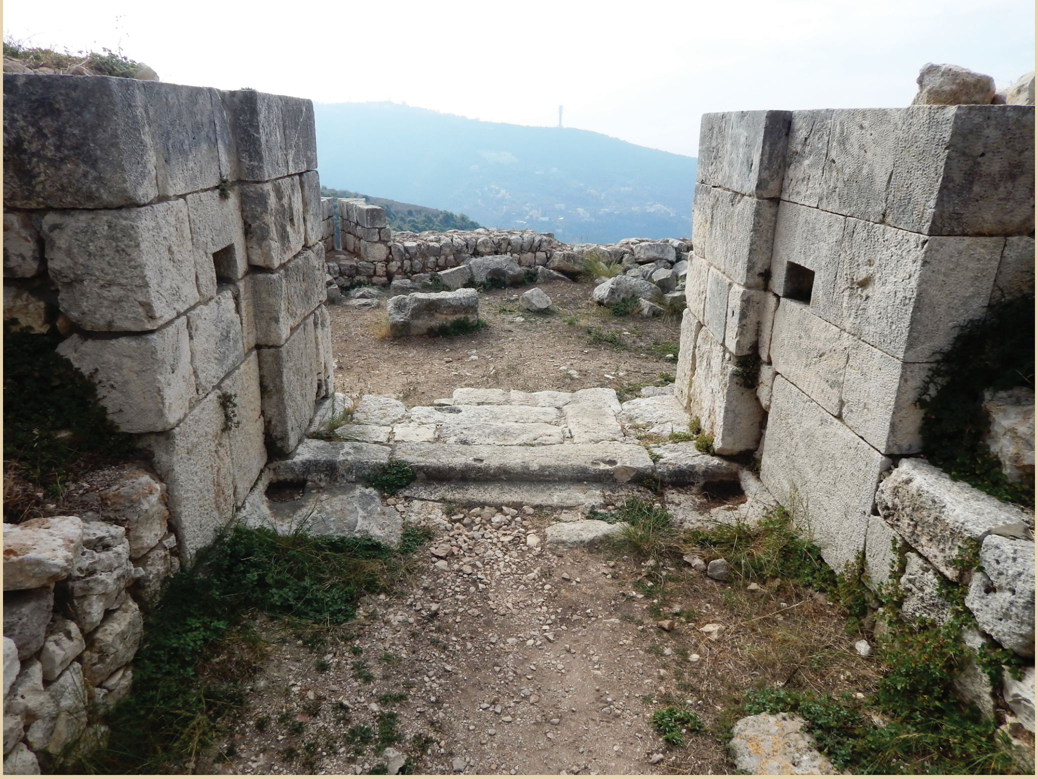

FIG. 17

The preserved door sockets of the tower's gate. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

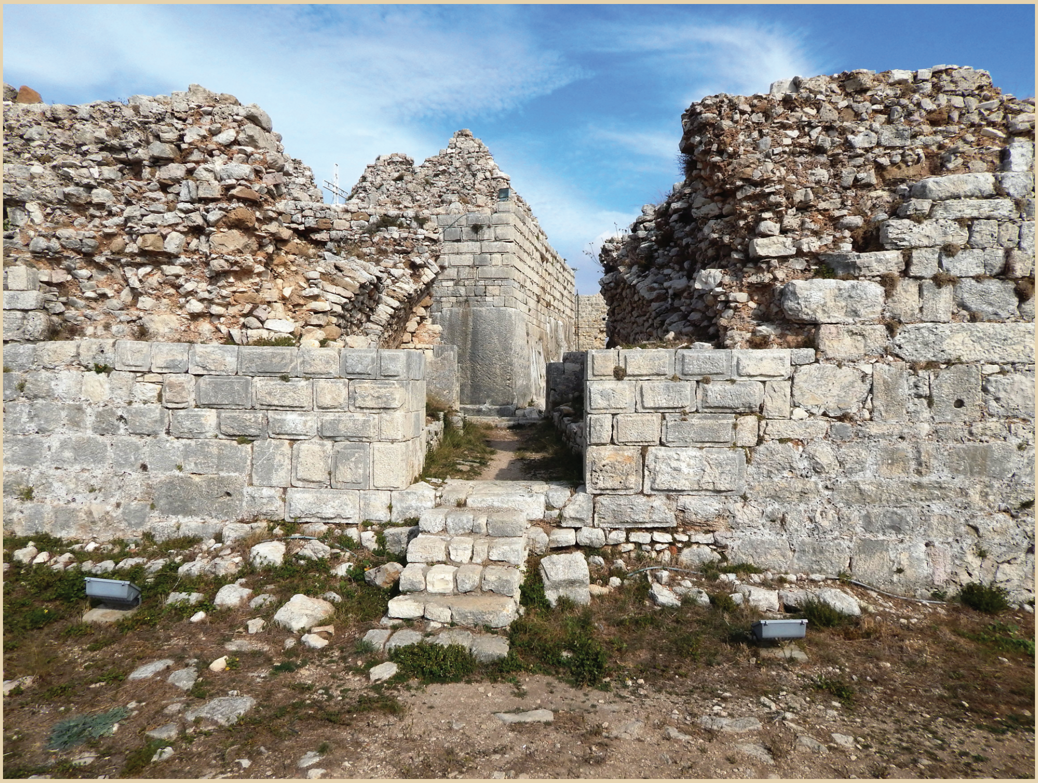

FIG. 18

The main entrance of the gate Tower T6 that would have been covered by a barrel vault. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

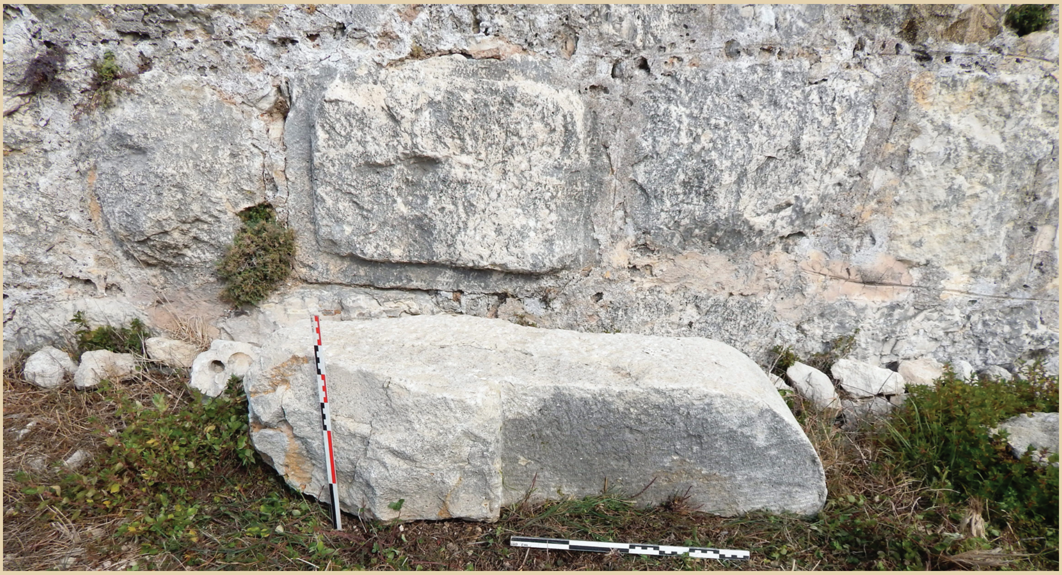

FIG. 19

A corbel, belonging to a brattice, found a few meters away from the gate-tower entrance. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

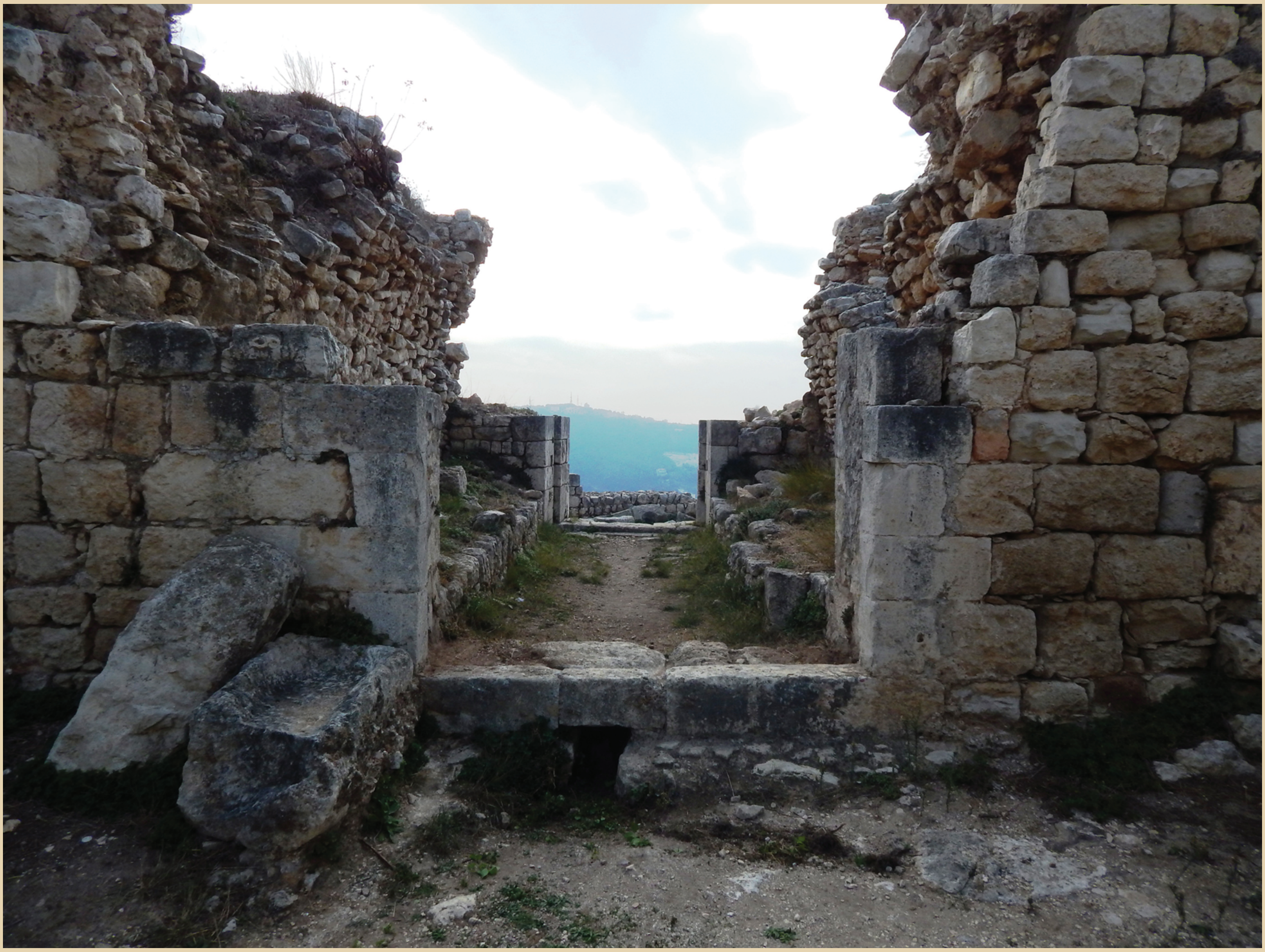

FIG. 20

The entrance passageway has two stone benches that cover a drain. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

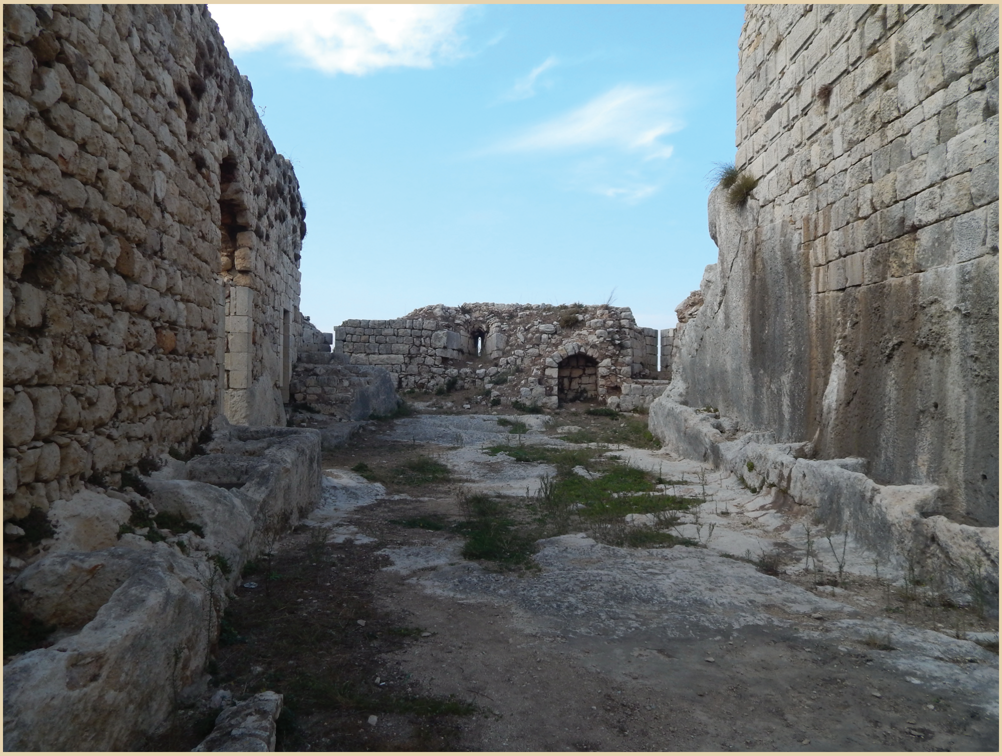

FIG. 21

The stable with water troughs cut into the rock at the bases of the walls. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

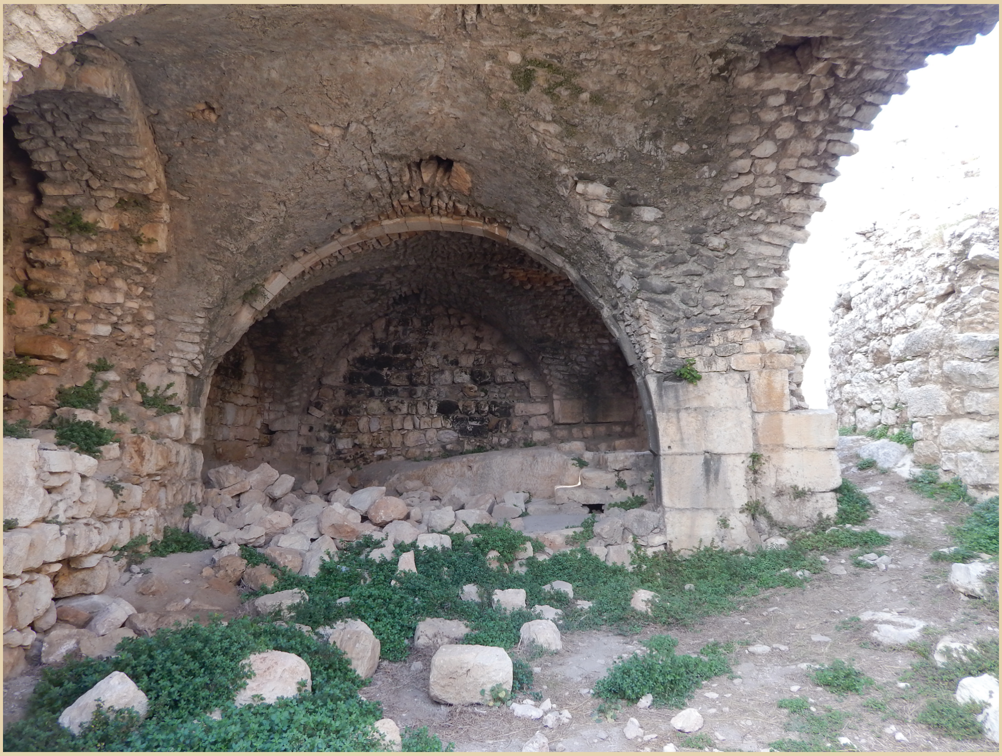

FIG. 22

The eastern building adjacent to the gate tower, featuring two preserved cross vaults. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

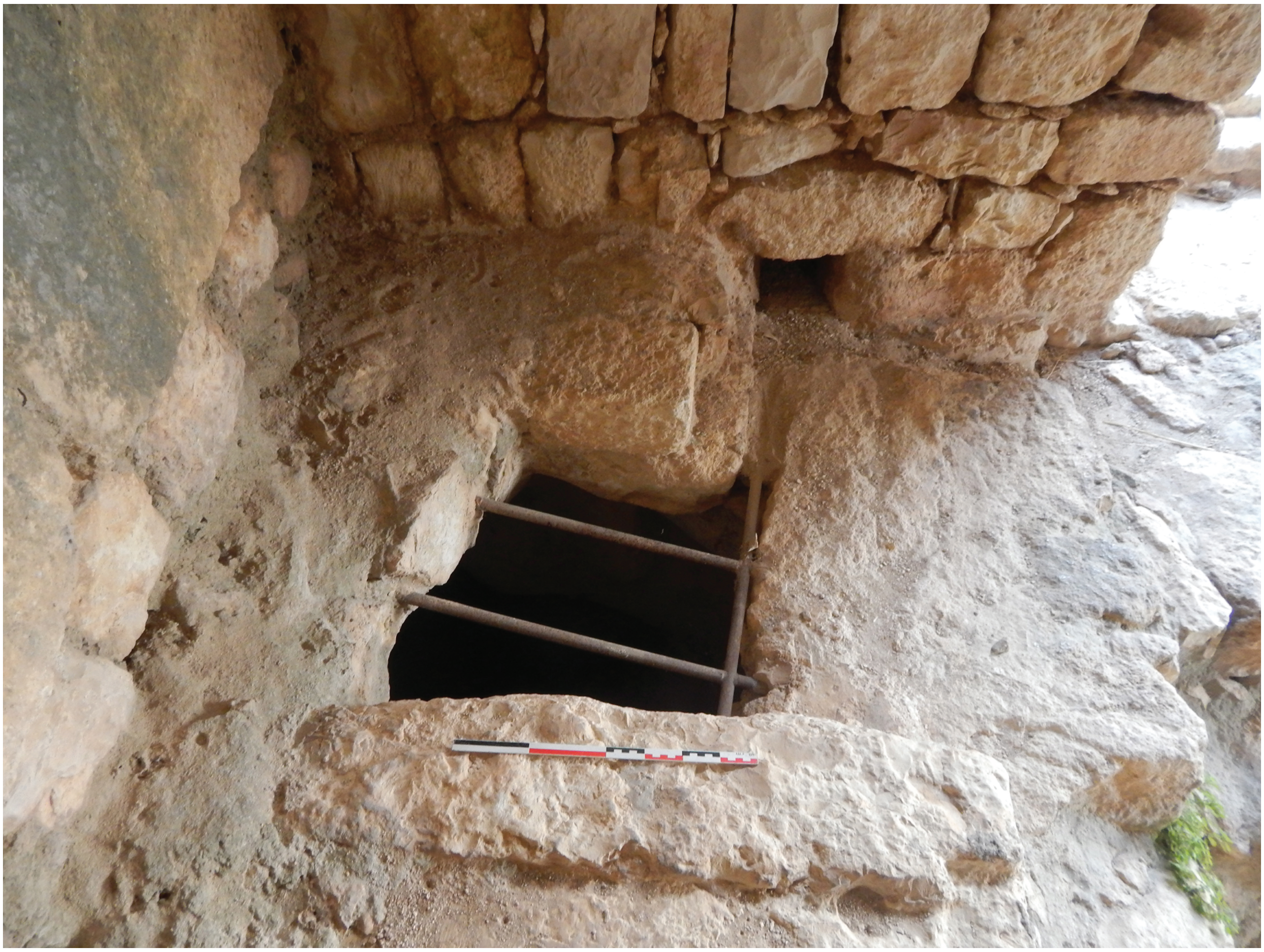

FIG. 23
A water tank carved into the rock. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

to the west of the entrance of the gate tower. It had a 1 m-wide single door equipped with a sliding wooden bar. Tower T1 has a square shape and is composed of at least two floors, but only its ground floor is still preserved. It has four arrow slits, each defending one side of the tower (Fig. 24). The northeast and southeast arrow slits control, respectively, northwestern Curtain Wall C1 and southwestern Curtain Walls C5 and C6, as well as the castle entrance. The southwestern arrow slit provides protection for the main entrance of the barbican. Masons' marks have been identified on the inner sides of the arrow slits (Fig. 25). On its western side, this tower houses a water cistern carved into the rocky foundation.[17]

Tower T5 protects the entrance of the gate tower from the east. It was composed of three levels: a ground floor and two upper floors (Fig. 26). Access to the ground floor is located in the northeastern wall, while the upper floors were reached from the adjacent buildings. Preserved ruins of the first floor are made up of two walls, each fitted with an arrow slit. One arrow slit commands the southern front and the path by the ditch leading to the site, while the second is oriented toward the west and controls the main entrance of the castle, as well as Curtain Walls C5 and C6. The second floor was covered with a barrel-vault ceiling—only its western part is preserved. The northwestern wall of the ground floor has the vestiges of a stoppered postern (Pt1) that was fitted with a sliding wooden bar (Fig. 27). It marks an earlier phase, where this postern led either to the southeast of the main entrance or to an exit below the castle in the valley through a natural rock cavity (see Fig. 8).[18]

A preliminary study of the quarrying of the stones showed that several walls, like the eastern façade of this tower (Fig. 28), were built with four or five different masonry techniques, which is highly unusual. Interviews with former workers and technicians revealed that these walls were restored by a former engineer at the DGA, Harout Kalayan, in the early 1970s. It appeared that Kalayan brought stones from other archaeological sites located a few kilometers to the east and northeast of Smar Jbeil and used them to restore the site.[19]

The Defense Systems

The southeastern front of the castle is composed of two curtain walls (C3 and C4), defended by two corner towers (T3 and T5), and a protruding tower (T4). This front is occupied by a two-story building with only the ground floor preserved. Partition walls are all that is left of the upper floor. The ground floor is composed of a series of rooms covered by cross vaults (Fig. 29), which are equipped with an average of seven arrow slits that control the ditch to the east.[20] The small tower (T3) occupies the eastern corner and has its ground floor covered by a well-built cross vault. This tower has two arrow slits defending the northeastern and southeastern sides. Its upper floor must have been equipped with two other superimposed arrow slits and an extra one in its northwestern corner to control Postern Pt2. The protruding tower (T4) is located in the middle of this eastern front. It had three arrow slits—one oriented to the east, while the other two provided protection to Curtain Walls C3 and C4. The tops of the eastern faces of the three towers (T3, T4, and T5) were undoubtedly equipped with brattices to ensure the defense of their bases and the bottom of the ditch. Two water cisterns are carved into the bedrock of the protruding part of Tower T4. Access to this tower is through a door (0.93 m wide) located in its northwestern wall.

Curtain Wall C3 probably had two arrow slits (Fig. 30), while the preserved part of Curtain Wall C4 would have two to three arrow slits. The interior of Curtain Wall C4 is a long gallery with a well-built entrance door (1.22 m wide), located in its northeastern wall. Approximately 5 m south of this door, a large chimney was built (see Fig. 8). The location of this gallery, as well as the presence of this beautiful door and the fireplace, could indicate that this space was the great hall of the castle. The staircase leading to the second floor is built against the northwestern façade of the great room. The southern corner of this front, occupied by Tower T5, is part of the southwestern front of the castle. The doors of Tower T4 and the great hall grant access to a rocky platform that overlooks the passage between this front and the donjon. Two water cisterns are carved into this rocky platform. The cover of the eastern one has been removed.

Northwestern Curtain Wall C1 is located between Towers T1 and T2. Its western part has three chambers with arrow slits, with the northern one being an arrow-slit chamber/latrine (Fig. 31).[21] These arrow slits defend northwestern Curtain Wall C8 of the barbican (Fig. 32). The space between Curtain Wall C1 and the bedrock of the donjon's foundation is narrow. Circulation to the seigniorial residence from this side is blocked by a built cistern, a chamber, and two walls. The remains of half a threshold and a column in high relief sculpted in the rock are recognizable on top of the bedrock at the western corner of the donjon (see below) (Fig. 33). These elements indicate an earlier occupation of the site prior to the construction of the donjon and the castle.

The northeastern front is composed of corner Towers T2 to the north and T3 to the east, as well as of a building whose external wall constitutes Curtain Wall C2. This wall is preserved only at an average height of 2 m. Postern Pt2 (1.55 m wide) is elevated (Durand 2001: 30) to overlook the ravine to the north of the promontory (Fig. 34). In case of siege, it would have allowed a messenger to exit discreetly at night by using a rope or rope ladder. This postern was defended by Towers T2 and T3. Similar posterns have been found in the castle of Saone in the principality of Antioch (Deschamps 1932: 379–80) and the castle of Saint Gilles in Tripoli (Chaaya 2007–2008: 158–60, 163–64).

The Seigniorial Residence with the Main Tower

The seigniorial residence is composed of Donjon T6, Tower T2, and the space that separates them (Fig. 35). Main Tower T7 is rectangular and measures ca. 16 m northeast–southwest and 14.3 m northwest–southeast (Fig. 36). Its entrance was on the northeastern side and elevated. Access to this entrance was possible using a wooden ladder or wooden staircase.[22] Today, a limestone staircase (3.77 m high) leads to the entrance of the tower (see Fig. 36). This tower had at least two floors, but only the ground-floor walls are preserved, and parts of the

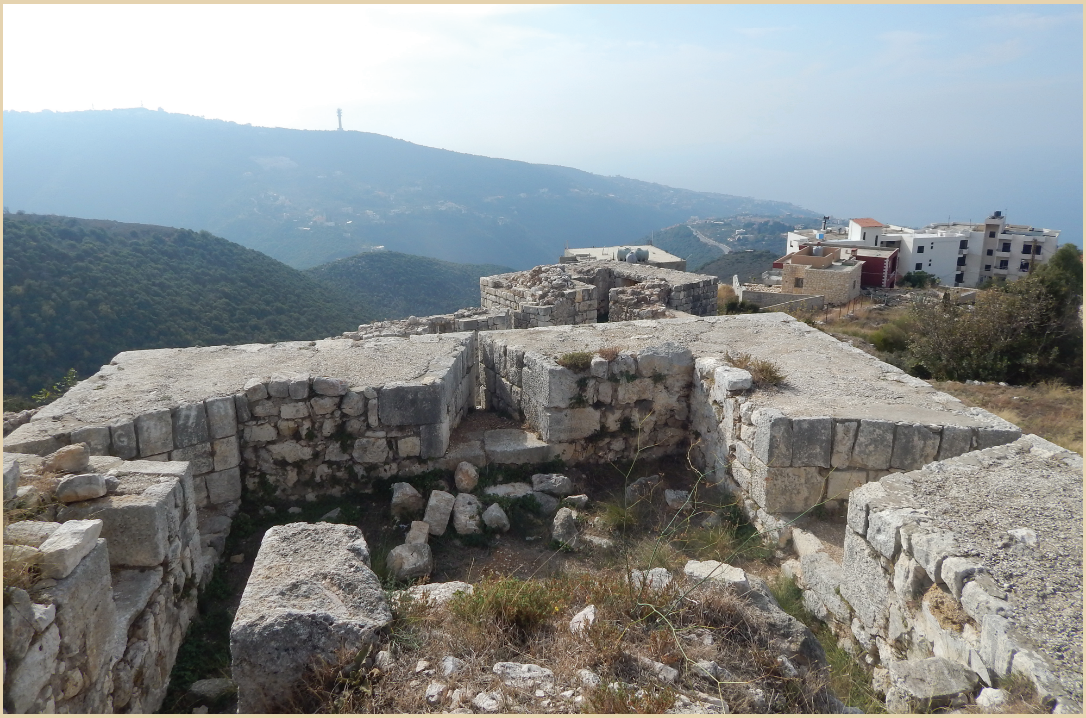

FIG. 24

Tower T1 with four arrow slits defending its respective sides. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

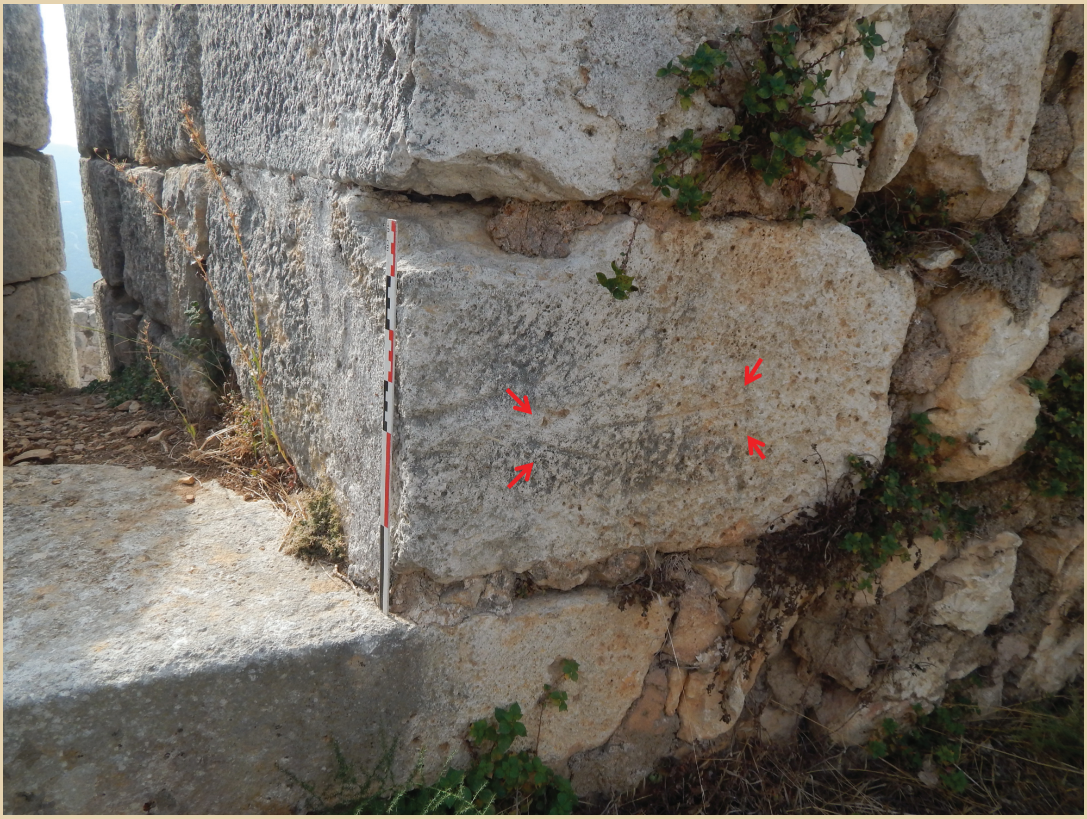

FIG. 25

Masons' marks (indicated with red arrows) engraved on the inner sides of an arrow slit. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

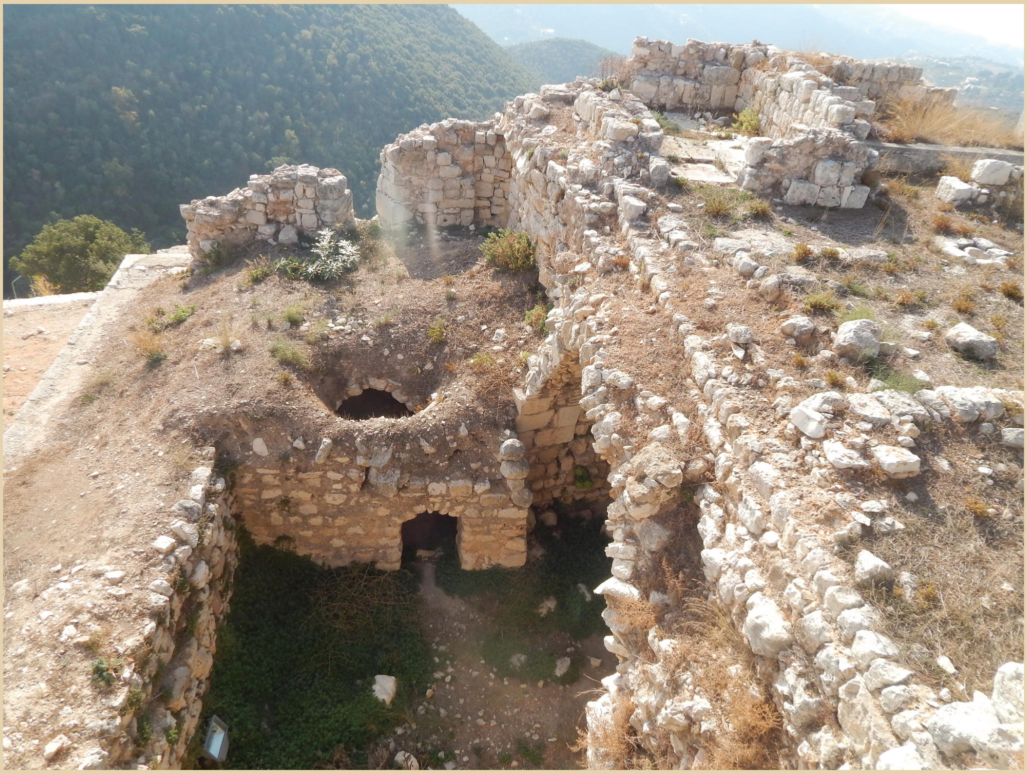

FIG. 26

Corner Tower T5, from the north. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

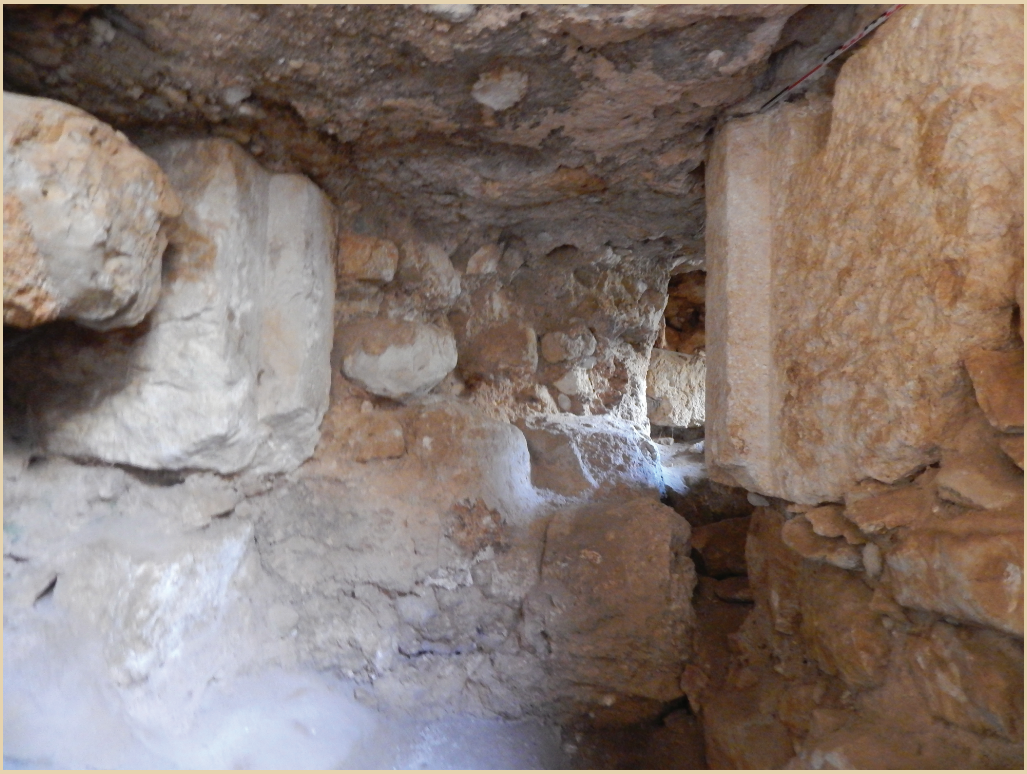

FIG. 27

The vestiges of Postern Pt1, dated to an older phase of the castle. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

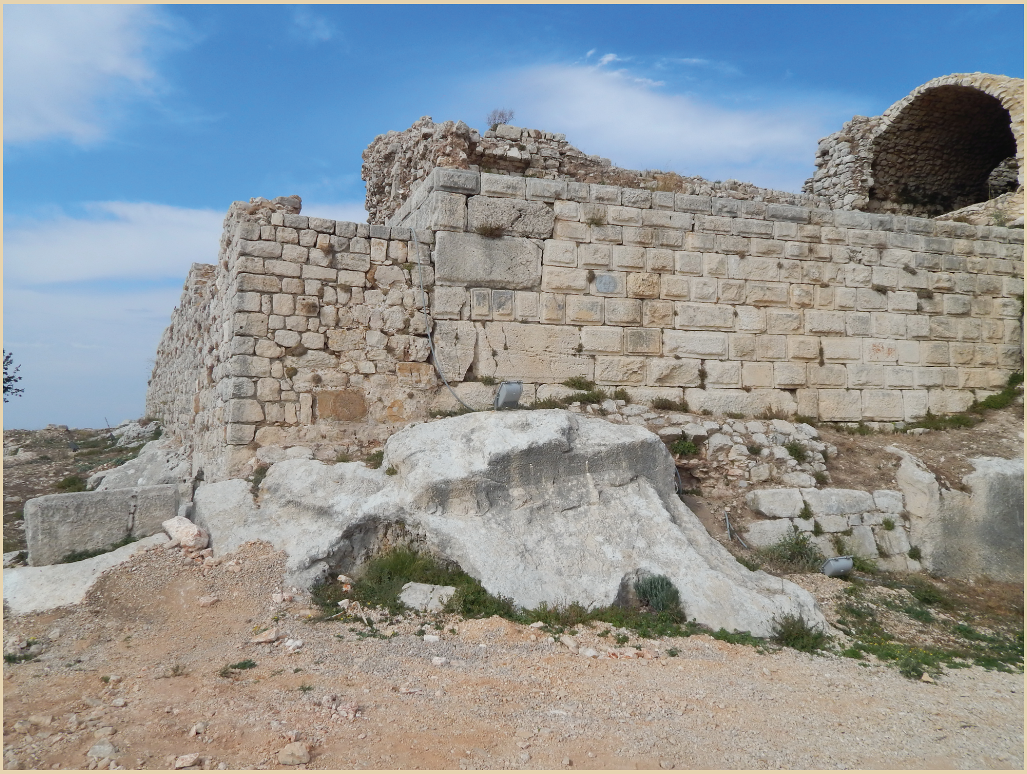

FIG. 28

The eastern façade of Tower T5 and the eastern segment of the barbican. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

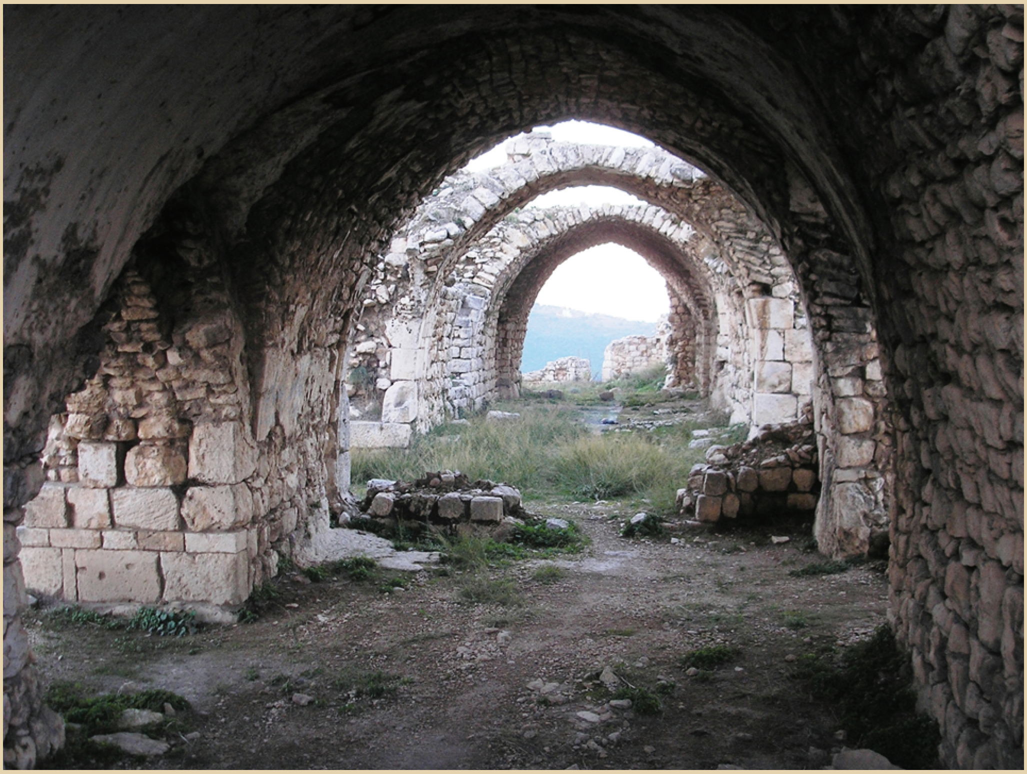

FIG. 29

The ground floor of the eastern front of the castle in its original state before restoration. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

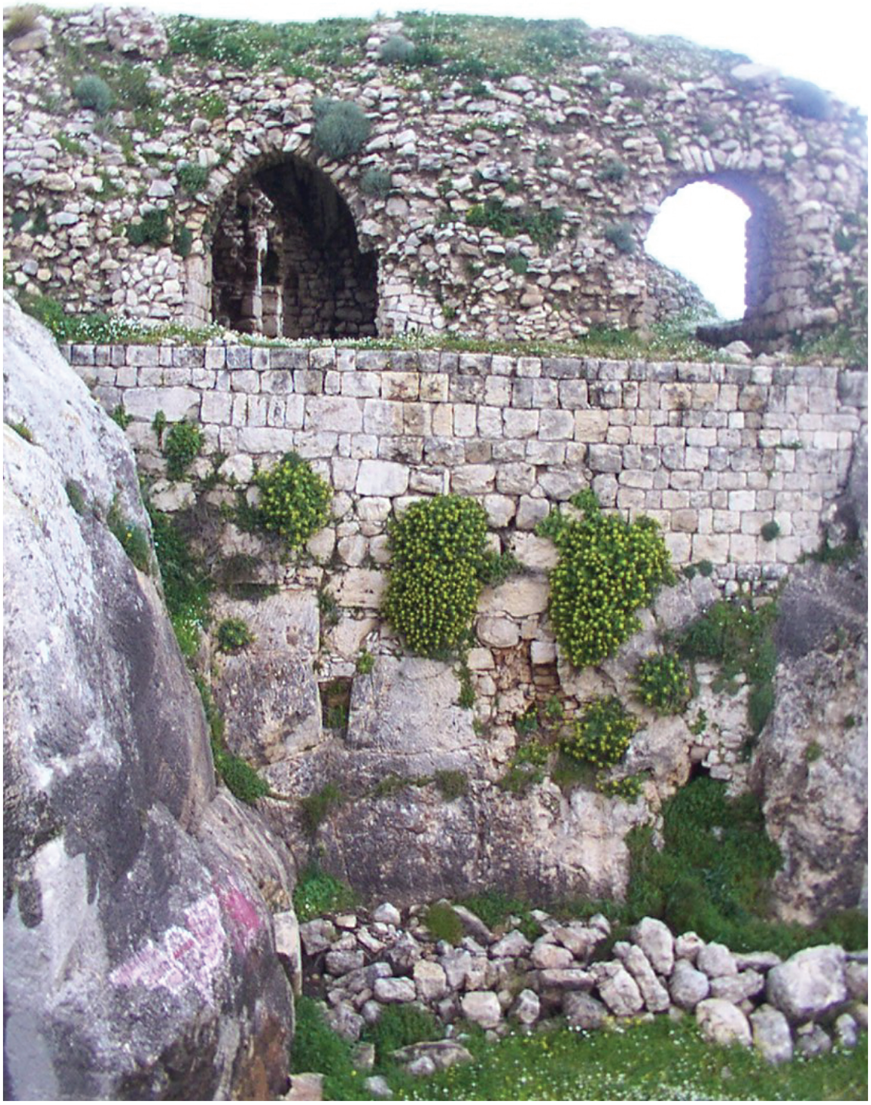

FIG. 30

Curtain Wall C3 in its original state before restoration. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

donjon's floor have collapsed near the entrance. A water cistern carved into the bedrock is located to the left of the entryway. The remains of several interior walls indicate the existence of a number of rooms on this floor.

The building at the northwest corner of the castle is formed by the northwestern corner Tower T2. It is located at the top of a rocky cliff that constitutes a natural defense from the northern and western sides. Its entrance is located in its southern wall. This building had two stories; only the first level is preserved up to the ceiling, which appears to be a cross vault. It is fitted with three arrow slits and a water cistern located in its basement. Two arrow slits defend the cliff from the north and west, while the third one, obstructed and plastered in a later phase, faces a door located at the northeastern base of the donjon. This door was set in the southwestern part of a wall,[23] separating the interior court of the castle from the space located between Donjon T6 and Tower T2.

Pre-Medieval Structures on the Site

The castle houses ten rainwater cisterns distributed throughout the site: one in each of Towers T1, T2, and T7; two inside Tower T4; four around the donjon (one to the

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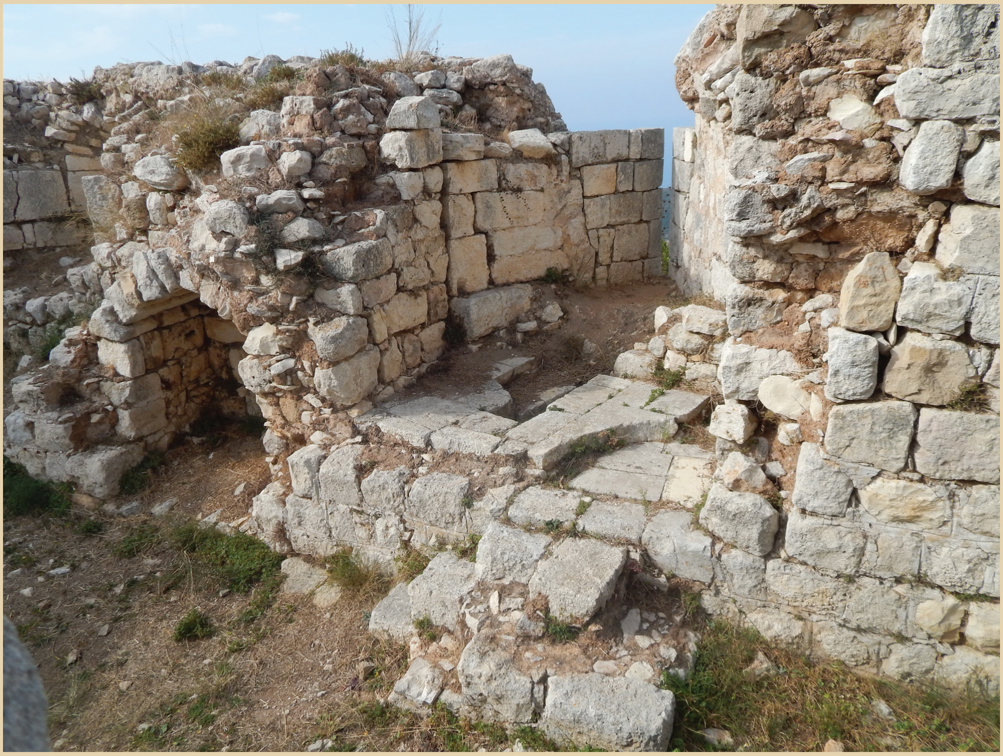

FIG. 31
The arrow-slit chamber/latrine in northwestern Curtain Wall C1. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

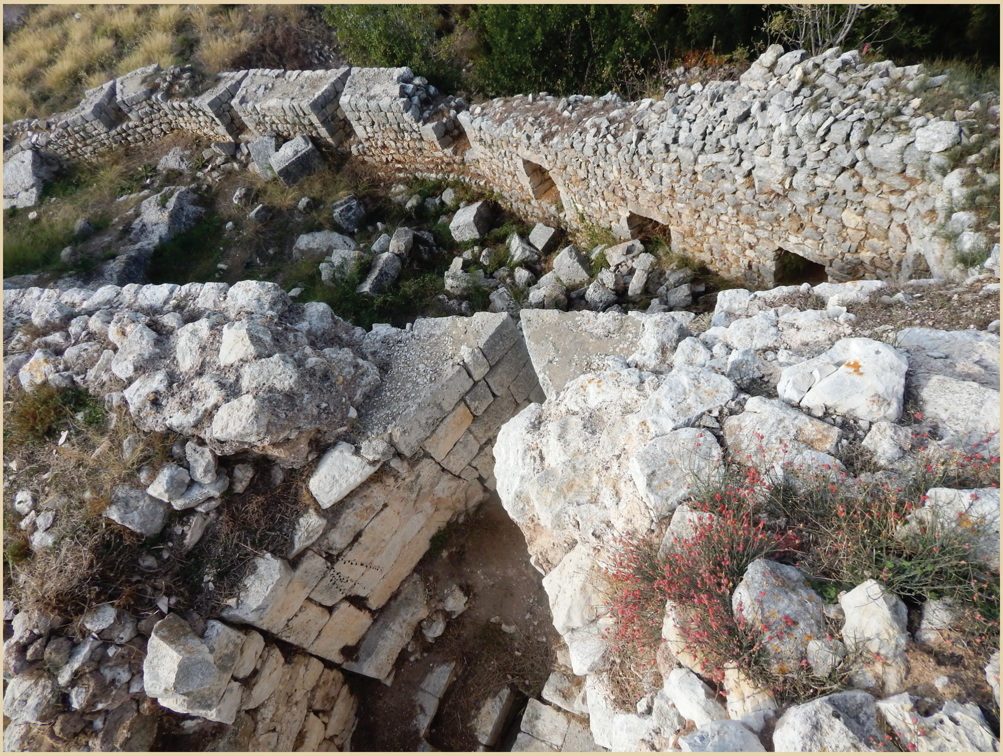

FIG. 32
The arrow slits of Curtain Wall C1 defended the northwestern front and Curtain Wall C8 of the barbican. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

northwest, two to the southeast, and one to the west); and one in the building located to the southeast of the main castle entrance (see Fig. 8). Since Smar Jbeil is located in an arid region lacking water resources, the existence of such a large number of water cisterns denotes the special attention paid by the builders and inhabitants of the castle in securing sufficient water reserves, especially for periods of siege.

The location of certain cisterns, however, poses a problem for the movement of inhabitants and garrison members inside the castle, indicating that the majority of these cisterns were built prior to construction of the castle. Indeed, very little difference in altitude is recorded between the cistern of the donjon and those located to the southeast and west of it. Thus, these cisterns must have been contemporaneous and functioned before the construction of the castle and the establishment of its circulatory network.

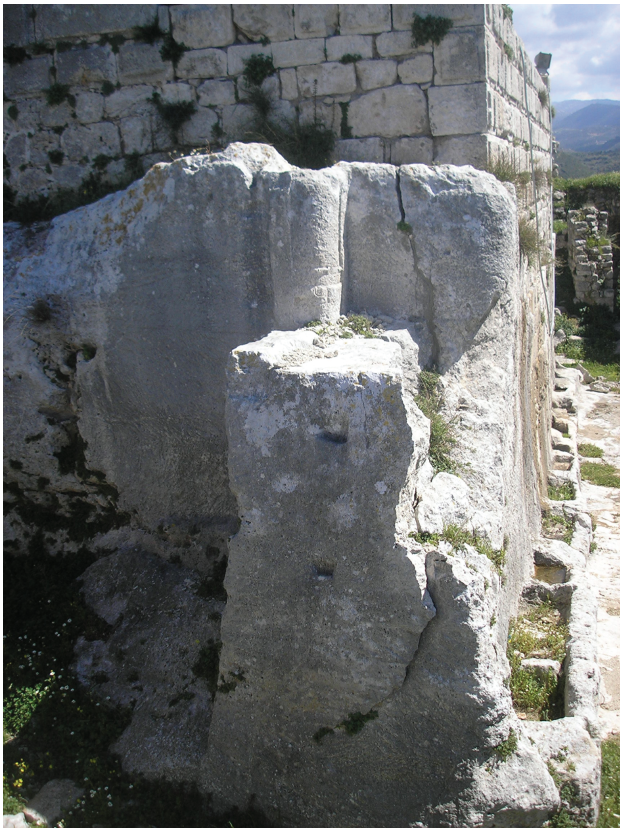

FIG. 33

A column in high relief and half of a threshold sculpted in the rock at the western corner of the donjon. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

The donjon's cistern and those located to its southeast have the same elevation as those of the threshold and the column carved into the rock at the western corner of the donjon (see Fig. 33), indicating that a room, either a cave installation or a *hypogeum*, must have existed northwest of the donjon and was probably destroyed when the space around the donjon was exploited as a stone quarry. Consequently, the bedrock was hollowed, creating the isolated rocky platform that served as a foundation base for the donjon. Additionally, the threshold and the column are not far geographically from the funeral constructions on the northern cliff (see below). Furthermore, a votive altar (Fig. 37) was discovered in the gallery of the southeastern front.[24] It was either used for worship or in a funeral installation. All of these are the remnants of a sanctuary and funeral installation, dating to the Roman period and thus existing prior to the construction of the castle.

The northern cliff and the eastern part of the ditch show vestiges of a Roman-era necropolis. A *hypogeum* carved into the rock of a type common to the late Roman period was found on the northeastern front (Figs. 38–40). Different types of tombs carved into the bedrock or located in small caves are also scattered throughout this cliff up to the eastern part of the ditch, where tombs carved into the rock are also found. Some of these tombs have been damaged by the installation of a quarry in this area. Understanding the chronological evolution of this sector is quite delicate, complicated especially by the discovery of Bronze Age pottery in a backfill from the cleaning of rock cavities during rehabilitation work at the site from 2012 to 2013.[25]

In the middle of the northeastern cliff, several bas-reliefs, heavily eroded, show seven human figures carved inside two panels, one relief facing the other by following the natural contours of the rock (Fig. 41). The eastern one has the shape of a rectangle and includes five standing characters, each in an individual frame. The western panel is smaller and contains only two characters, including one sitting, probably a woman. This panel has a certain resemblance to the seated Phoenician veiled women in the bas-reliefs at Ghineh and Mashnaqa (Seyrig 1940: 113–16), two villages located in the Mount Lebanon range.

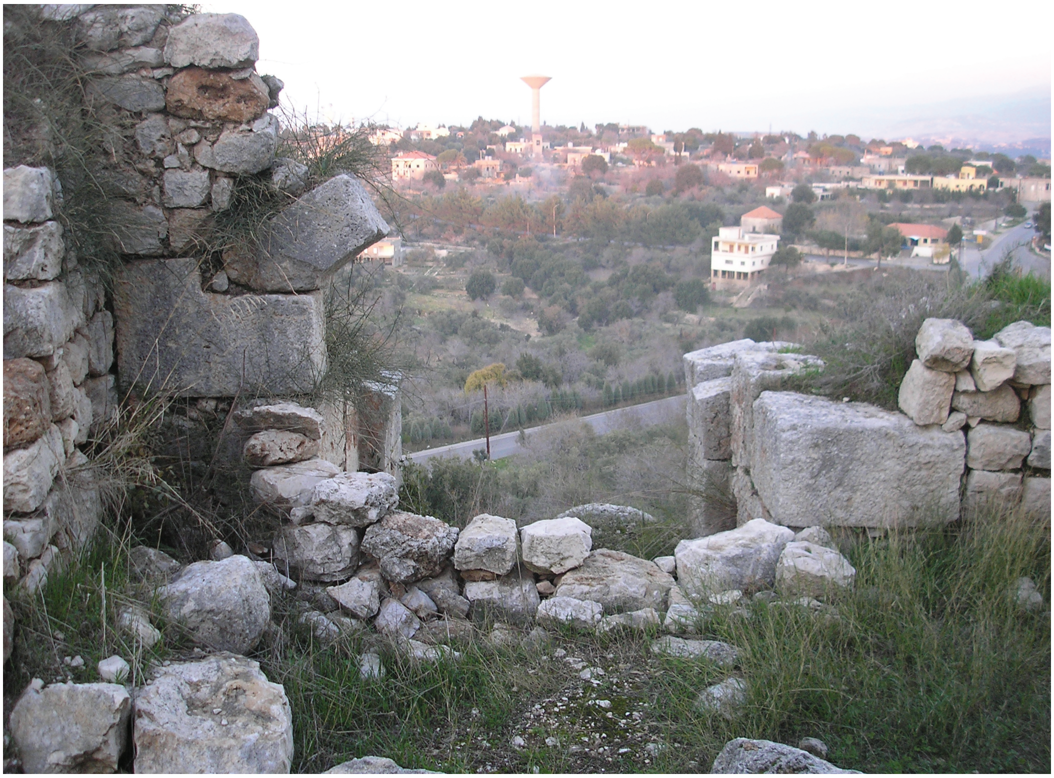

FIG. 34
Postern Pt2 overlooking the ravine to the north of the castle. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

Synthesis: The Role of the Castle

The castle of Smar Jbeil is a mountain castle designed and built by the Franks during the twelfth century AD on the rocky outcrop location of a previous worship site, dated to the Roman period. It was the seat of a small group of feudal seigniors falling within the barony of Boutron (modern Batrun). In the Middle Ages, the castle underwent three consecutive phases of construction. The first phase is dated to the first quarter of the twelfth century AD. The general plan of the castle and its donjon, built with white embossed limestone, presents similarities with the castle of Jbeil/Byblos. As for the barbican, it was added around the end of the first half of the twelfth century AD. The remains of Postern Pt1, discovered on the ground floor of southern corner Tower T5, date back to the first phase of the castle. The similarities between the doorjambs of this postern and its sliding bar with those of the doors in the northeastern wall of this tower, western corner Tower T1, and Postern Pt2 indicate their contemporaneity.

The defensive layout of the enclosure of the castle was used for the construction of the barbican. Following the same logic, the builders of the second enclosure tried to benefit from the natural topography of the site by placing the main entrance of the barbican at the end of a forced pathway defended on its right side by Curtain Wall C7 and its arrow slits. It is also important to emphasize that this entrance was installed in the vicinity of a small ravine and close to corner Tower T8 and beneath corner Tower T1, which ensured its protection. This strategic location put attackers in range of the arrow slits located in Curtain Wall C7, corner Tower T8, and those in the upper part of Curtain Walls C5 and C6 (see Fig. 8). From the differences in typology and layout of some arrow slits, it is clear that the second enclosure formed by Curtain

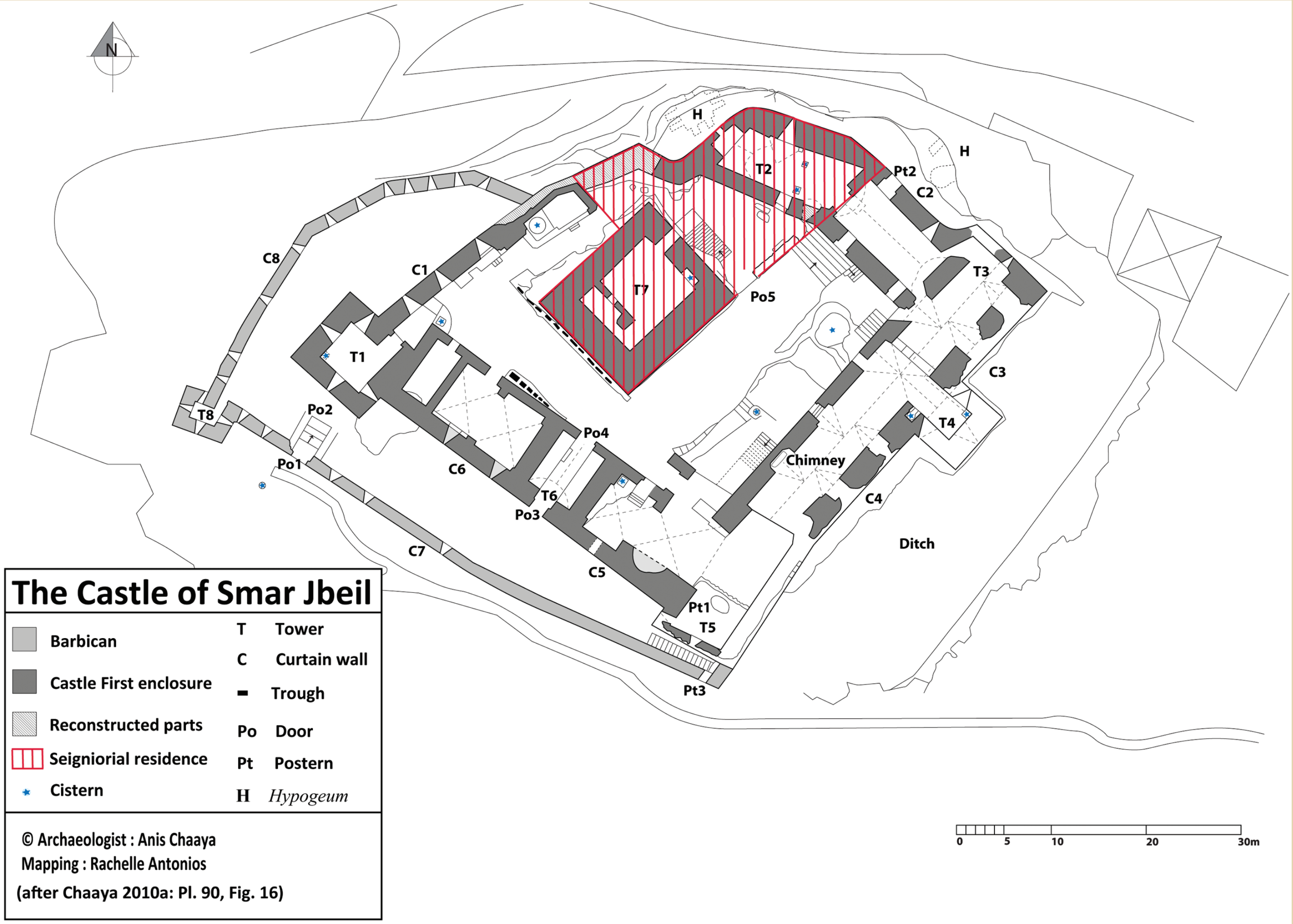
The Castle of Smar Jbeil
Barbican
Castle First enclosure
Reconstructed parts
Seigniorial residence
Cistern
T Tower
C Curtain wall
Trough
Po Door
Pt Postern
H *Hypogeum*
© Archaeologist : Anis Chaaya
Mapping : Rachelle Antonios
(after Chaaya 2010a: Pl. 90, Fig. 16)
N
H
T2
Pt2
C2
T3
C3
T4
Po5
T7
C1
C8
T1
T8
Po2
Po1
C6
Po4
T6
Po3
C7
C5
Pt1
T5
Pt3
Chimney
C4
Ditch
0
5
10
20
30m

FIG. 35
Plan of the seigniorial residence (shaded in red), including Donjon T6 and Tower T2 (after Chaaya 2010a: pl. 90, fig. 16).

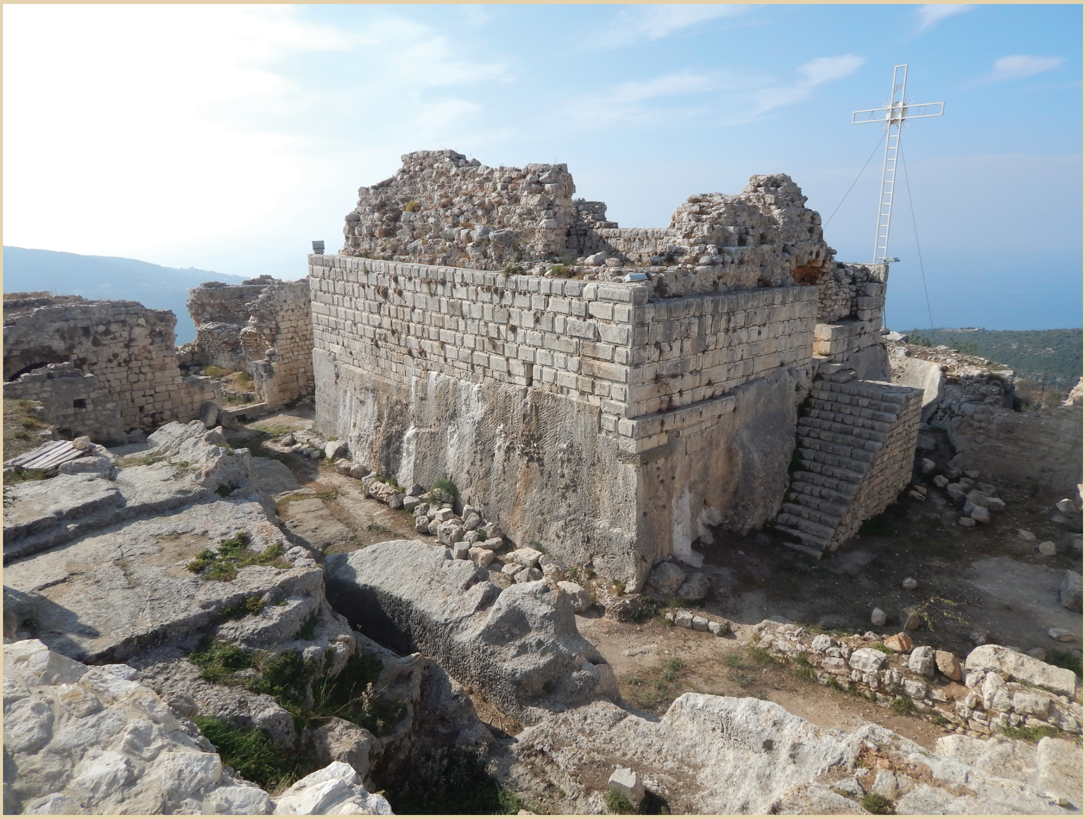

FIG. 36
The main tower or donjon and the modern limestone staircase leading to it. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

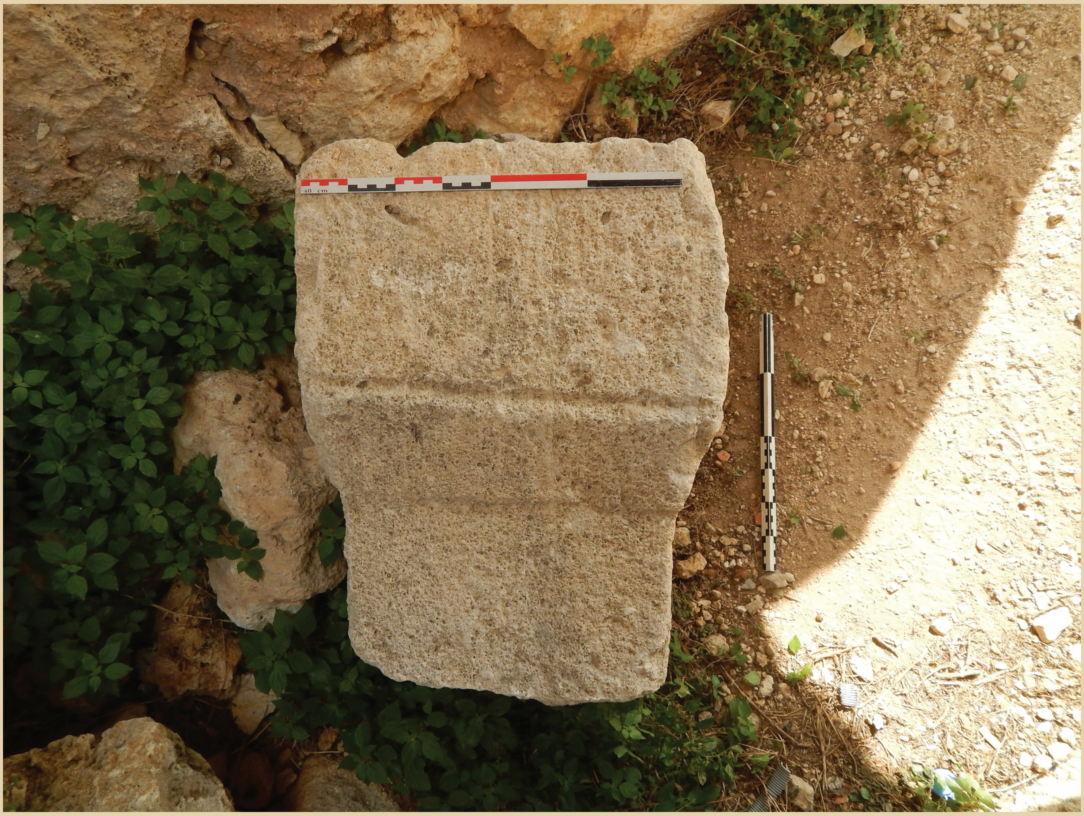

FIG. 37
A votive altar discovered in the gallery of the southeastern front. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

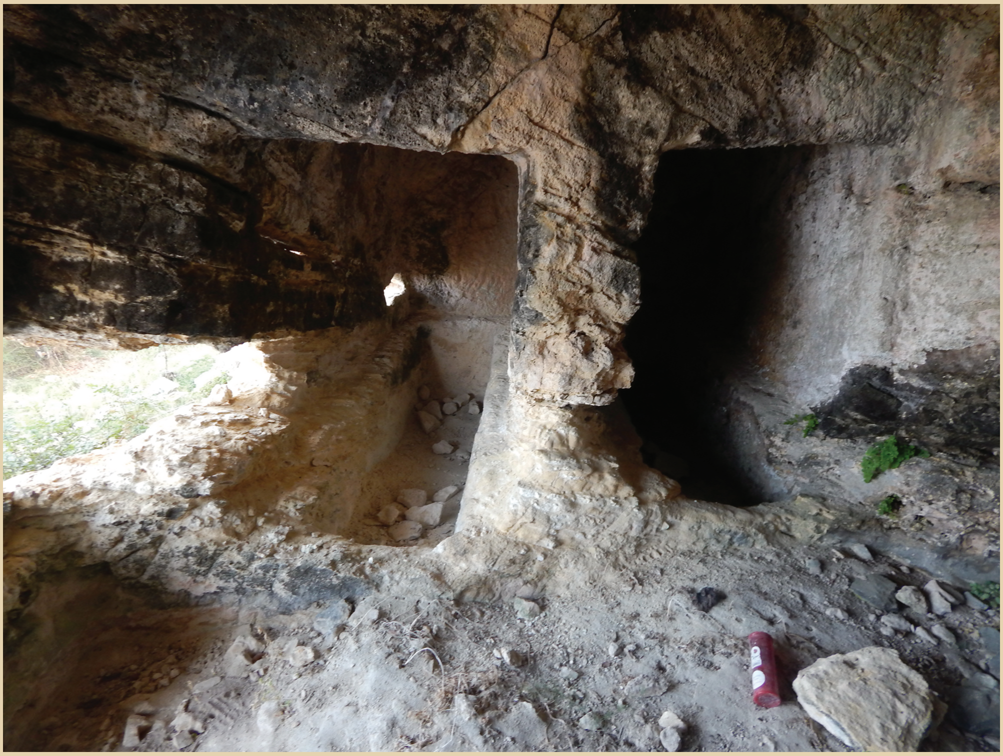

FIG. 38

The eastern part of a Roman *hypogeum* carved into the rock of the northern cliff. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

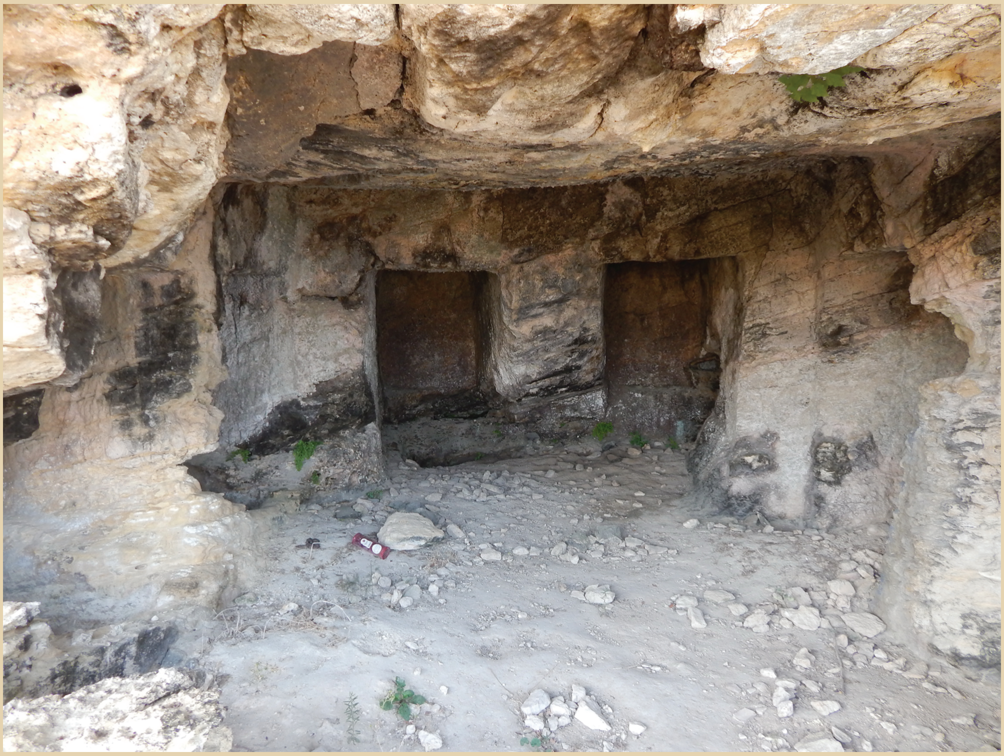

FIG. 39

The southern part of the Roman *hypogeum* carved into the rock of the northern cliff. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

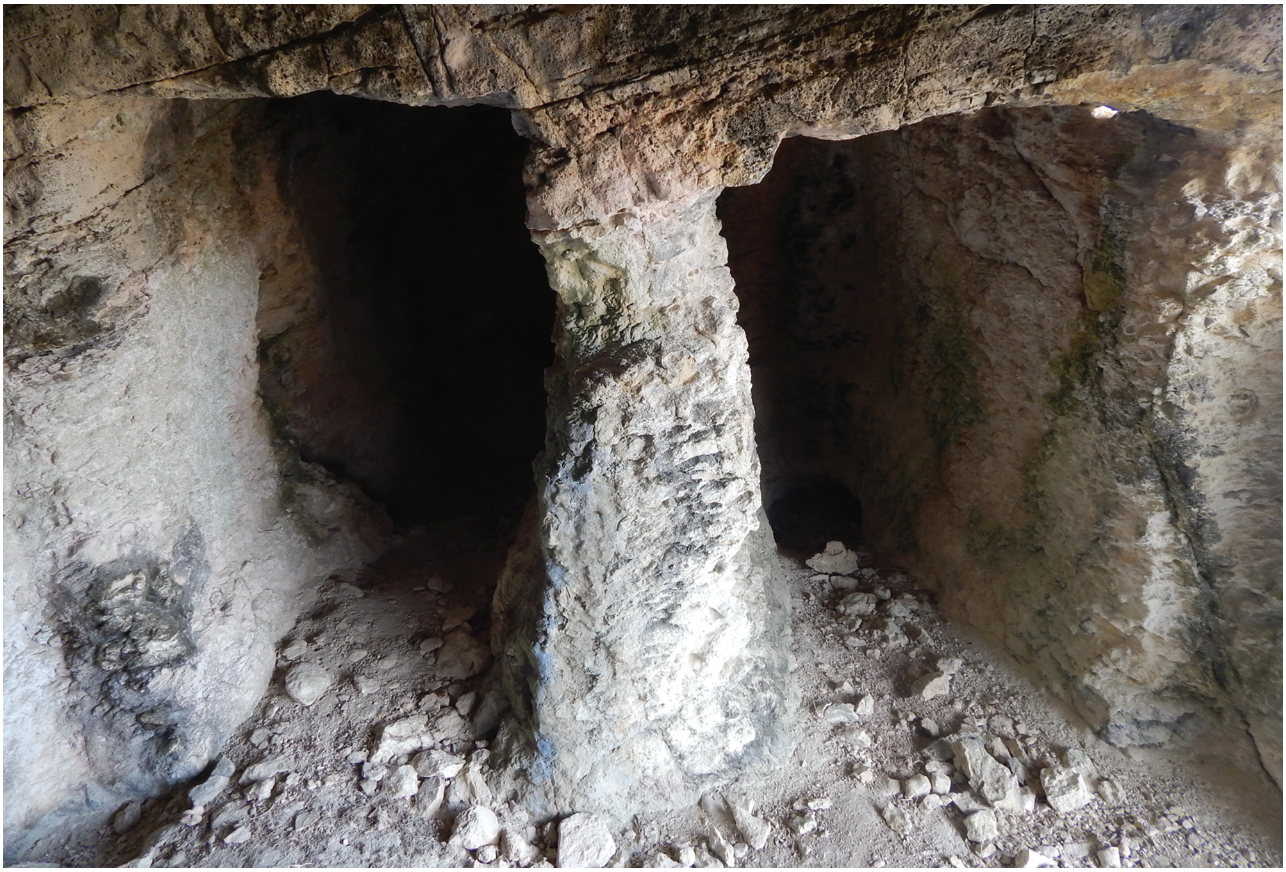

FIG. 40
The western part of the Roman *hypogeum* carved into the rock of the northern cliff. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

Walls C7 and C8 is subsequent to the castle enclosure. The study of the curtain walls of the barbican and its arrow slits shows a certain similarity with the site of Al-Bara,[26] located in the southeastern part of the principality of Antioch and whose fortifications date to the first half of the twelfth century AD (Fourdrin 1995: 354, 371–73, 381–83; Chaaya 2010a: 184).[27]

The implementation of poliorcetic (art of siege warfare) methods (Garlan 1974: 3–7; 1999: 117; Adam 1982: 253)[28] in Smar Jbeil is clear by the choice of the site's location, which benefits maximally from the terrain and the organization of superimposed shooting fronts in areas where the natural defenses of the castle were vulnerable. Therefore, each of the northwestern, southwestern, and southeastern fronts has a concentration of three defensive lines with several areas of shooting with crossbows and archery. The first line of the northwestern and southwestern fronts is formed by the barbican with Curtain Walls C7 and C8, and corner Tower T8. The second line consists of Curtain Walls C1, C6, and C5, and Towers T1, T6, and T5. The ditch is the first defensive line of the southeastern front. It is protected by the second defensive line formed by Towers T3, T4, and T5, and Curtain Walls C3 and C4. Donjon T7 forms the third line of defense overlooking all of the defensive fronts of the castle.

Owing to its geographical and topographical position, the castle has a wide ranging view over the Mediterranean Sea to the west; the Mount Lebanon range to the north, east, and south; and all of the mountains of the Batrun and Jbeil regions, with the medieval village of Maad to the south on the other side of the Madfoun Valley. While the view from the castle to the southwest is only of a small portion of the valley

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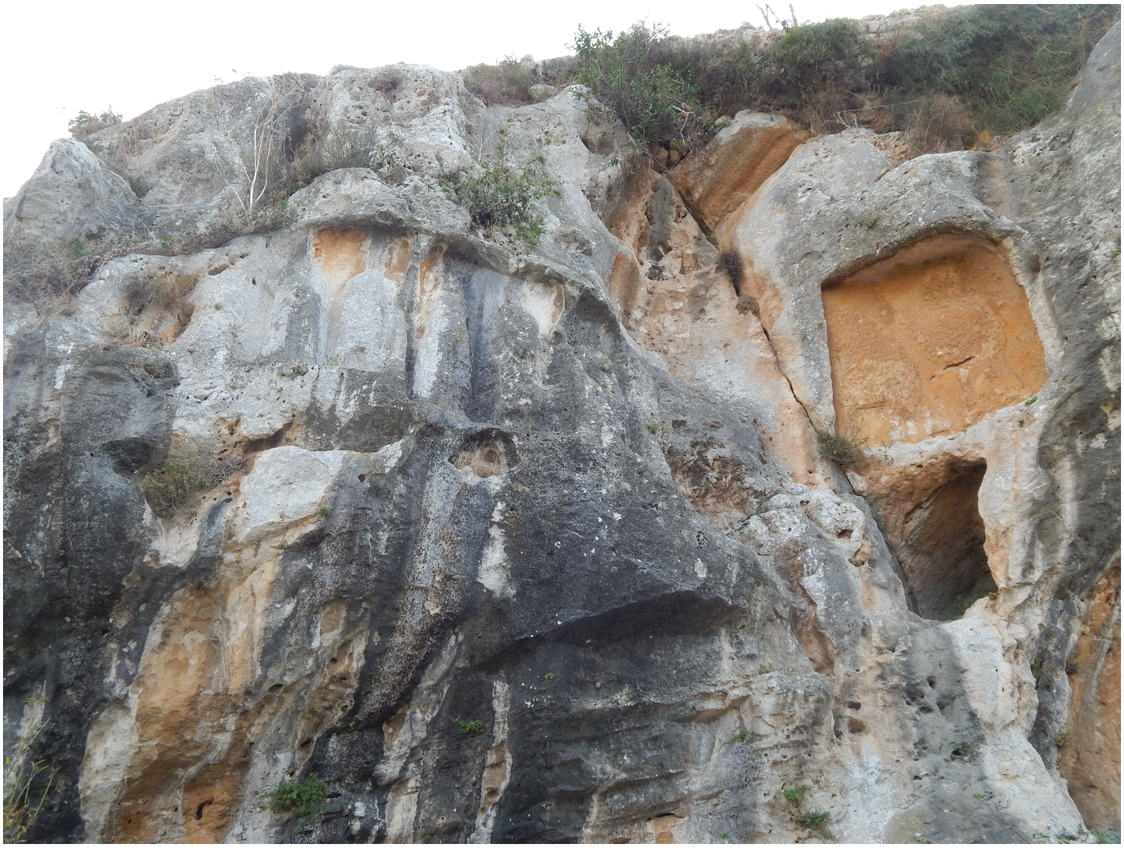

FIG. 41
Several bas-reliefs carved into the rock of the northern cliff. (Photo by A. Chaaya.)

of Nahr al-Madfoun, it reaches the heights of the Ras al-Shaqʿa cape, the famous *Theoprosopon* of Greek antiquity[29] (Salamé-Sarkis 2005; Davie and Salamé-Sarkis 1991; Dussaud 1927: 71; Chaaya 2010a: 31, 109, 259), as well as the coast of Selaata (Fig. 42). Placed in the intermediate territory between the coastal zone and the country side of the Batrun and Jbeil, Smar Jbeil served throughout its history as a stronghold connecting two vitally important regions in both antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Notes

1. The castle is located east of the modern city of Tripoli.
2. Some authors claim that the castle overlooked and commanded Batrun (Richard 1948: 53–59), but a hill obstructs the view of the city. This misinformation is constantly repeated by the majority of publications mentioning the castle of Smar Jbeil.
3. The study of this castle was presented by the author on November 29, 2013, at the colloquium “Cultural, Social, Economic and Diplomatic Exchange between East and West,” organized in Fanar, Lebanon, by the Department of History–Section 2 of the Lebanese University and the École

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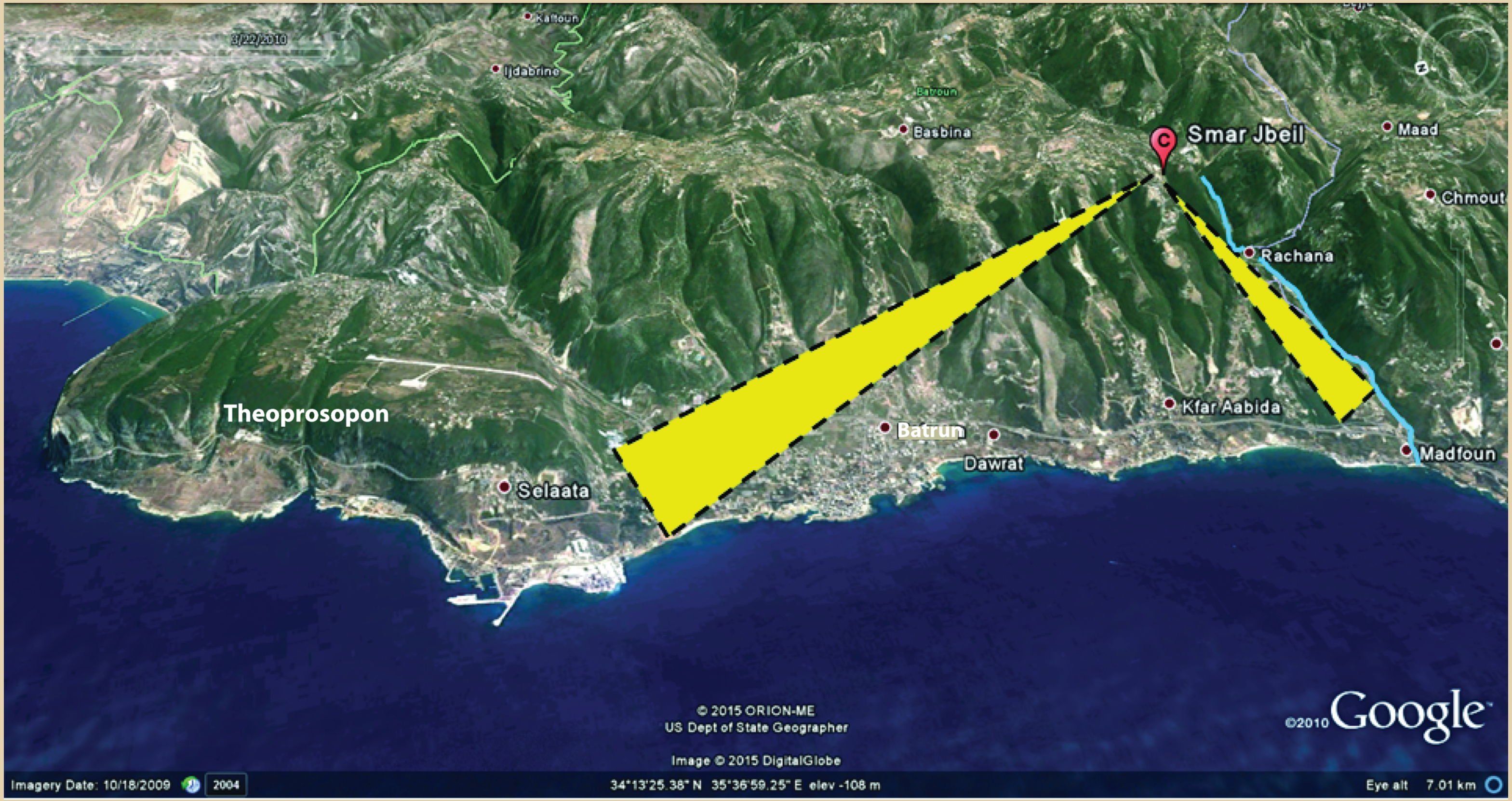
Kafloun
3/22/2010
Ijdabrine
Batroun
Basbina
Smar Jbeil
Maad
Chmout
Rachana
Kfar Aabida
Theoprosopon
Batrun
Dawrat
Madfoun
Selaata
© 2015 ORION-ME
US Dept of State Geographer
Image © 2015 DigitalGlobe
©2010 Google
Imagery Date: 10/18/2009
2004
34°13'25.38" N 35°36'59.25" E elev -108 m
Eye alt 7.01 km

FIG. 42

The view toward the sea covers a small portion of Nahr al-Madfoun to the right and the heights of Ras al-Shaq'a cape (ancient *Theoprosopon*) and the modern town of Selaata to the left. (Map data © GoogleEarth and DigitalGlobe.)

pratique des hautes études (EPHE)–Paris, France. Also, in 2009 the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Warsaw made an architectural inventory of the medieval castle of Smar Jbeil.

4. Further archaeological investigations might confirm these narratives or give proof to settlements dated to the seventh century AD.
5. This expropriation was done by the author, who was then the officer in charge of North Lebanon at the DGA.
6. Castrum Rubrum is Qalʿat Yahmur and is located to the west of *Krak des Chevaliers* in Syria.
7. None of the entrances, arrow slits, and cisterns was recorded on the plan.
8. Paintings discovered by the author in 2004 during the restoration and study campaign of the hermitage.
9. The Valley of Qadisha and the Forest of the Cedars of God was deemed a Cultural Landscape on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 1998 (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/850).
10. A small worship altar (0.80 by 0.50 by 0.50 m) was found in the eastern part of the castle. In addition, a Roman *hypogeum* is located inside a cave in the cliff under the northwestern side of the site.
11. A barbican is a fortified outpost or gateway. An advanced fortified structure placed in front of an entrance accessible through a limited-access entrance.
12. An alphanumeric codification was adopted. The abbreviation with one or two letters designates each structure or architectural element, followed by a serial number. The codification is applied starting from the northern front, from west to east, in a clockwise direction.
13. The device complies with the recommendations of Vitruvius by placing the entrance in such a way that forced the besiegers, who wear their shields on their left arms, to present their right flanks unprotected to the defenders placed on the curtain walls and the defensive structures, which controlled access to the castle and its entrance.
14. Both of them were equipped with sliding wooden bars, whose holes are preserved in the thickness of the walls.
15. A small stone structure projected out beyond the main part of a castle wall, so as to give flanking fire along that wall while still offering some degree of protection.
16. This tower has similarities with the gate tower of the castle of Saint Gilles in Tripoli: an entrance in its ground floor with an *entrée en sas* covered by a barrel vault, topped by a story, and provided with a hatch that controls the passage of the ground floor.
17. This cistern is currently clogged and backfilled.
18. An excavation will provide further information on the reality of this postern and its outlet.
19. This showed that any further study and investigation were not really useful especially since some parts of the castle were restored with imported material from two to three various sites and without any data kept from these renovation works at the DGA. The restored parts are recognized by the modern cement that Kalayan used as a binder instead of traditional lime mortar.
20. They were in a very bad state of conservation. Recently, the vaults were poorly restored, making all traces of the partition of the second floor disappear. (Only the traces of two walls are slightly perceptible.) Also the whole southeastern façade was badly rebuilt, creating false arrow slits.
21. It presents elements of a later rearrangement; its actual state could be dated to Mamluk period.
22. The former of which was movable and the latter could be burned in case of siege.
23. This wall was also recognizable with its foundation traces.
24. The altar has been displaced twice by looting attempts. The last time it was thrown into the ditch in order to be moved away from the site. Currently, it is deposited on the inside of the postern of the barbican (Pt3).
25. The cleaning that took place for the planned rehabilitation of the site was conducted without any supervision by archaeologists and with complete disregard for the future study of the stratigraphy and evolution of the site despite the recommendations made by the officer in charge of the North Lebanon district at the DGA, Mrs. Samar Karam. However, it is important to note that in 2015, Mr. Sarkis el-Khoury, the newly appointed director of the DGA, imposed special precautions and technical follow-up for the site's conservation project.
26. Al-Bara is located to the northeast of Lattakieh and northwest of Maʿarat al-Noʿman in Syria. In 1099, it was captured by Raymond of Saint Gilles, count of Toulouse and founder of the county of Tripoli, who transformed it into the first Episcopal lordship in the Latin East with the bishop Peter of Narbonne (Dussaud 1927: 172–73; Richard 1996: 91). A treaty signed between Bohemund I, prince of Antioch, and Saint Gilles ended the possessions of the latter in the region of Antioch (Richard 1945: 12; Fourdrin 1995: 357). However, Bishop Peter and his successors kept close ties with the counts of Tripoli (Fourdrin 1995: 357–58; Chaaya 2010a: 63, 76–78).
27. The shape of the arrow slits on southwestern Curtain Walls GH and HI at Al-Bara are dated from Phase 5 of the site.
28. The rules of defensive (poliorcetic) architecture were established in Greece in the middle of the third century BC and remained in use without major modification until the medieval period.
29. The promontory of Ras al-Shaqʿa/*Theoprosopon* is a large cape in the shape of a projection of the mountain into the Mediterranean Sea. It is a massive barrier oriented northeast–southwest, forming a plateau that measures approximately 5 km long by 2 km wide. The limits of that plateau are composed on all four edges by vigorous escarpments and cliffs. In AD 551, an earthquake caused the collapse of the western side of Ras al-Shaqʿa and the road

passing over it. Since then, the road has been rerouted to the east of the promontory through a pass.

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